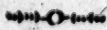
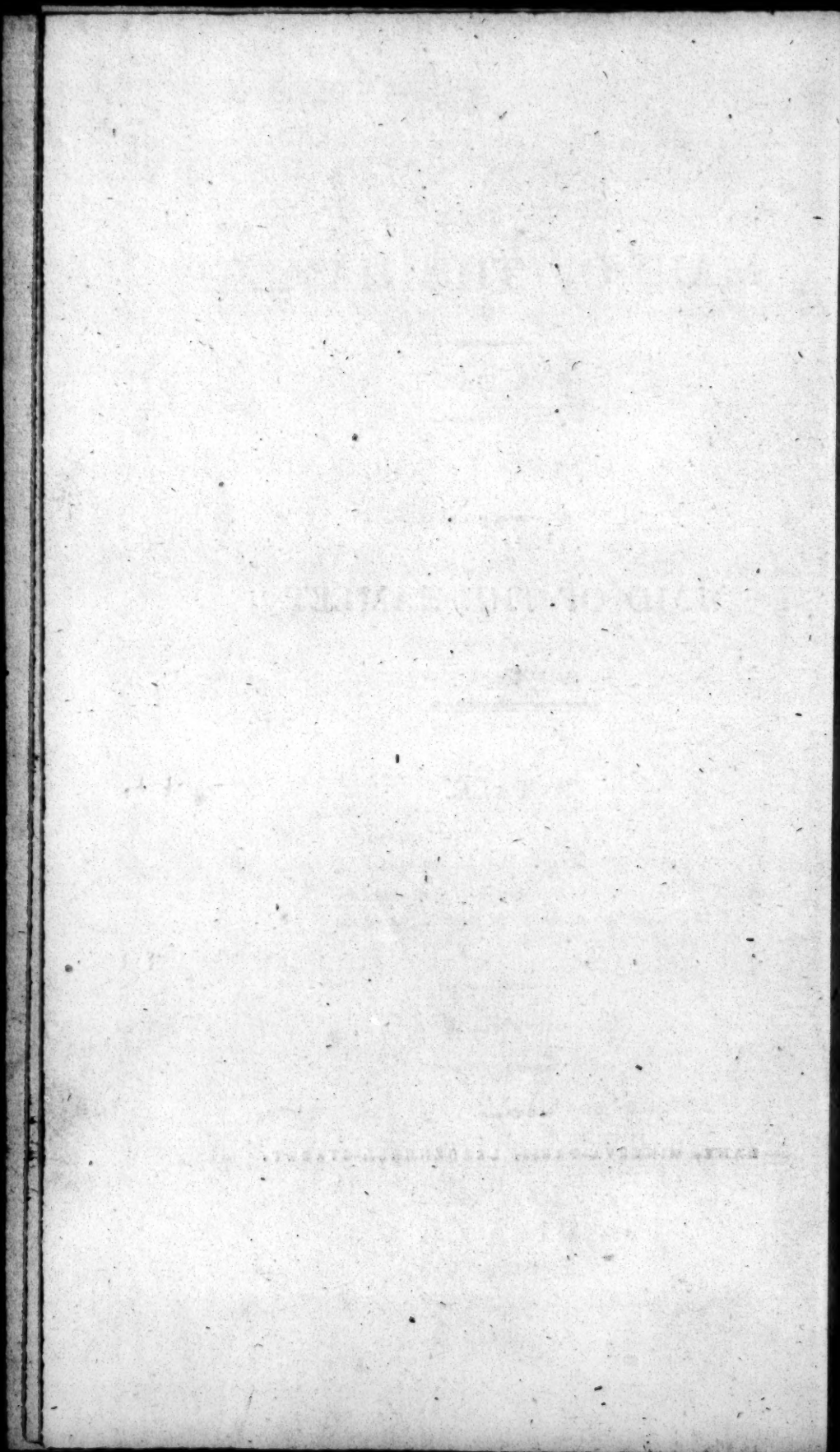


Cwp. 403. p. 21.

THE
MAID OF THE HAMLET.

A TALE.


BANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.



THE
MAID OF THE HAMLET.

A TALE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

REGINA MARIA ROCHE,

AUTHOR OF

The Children of the Abbey, Vicar of Lansdowne, Clermont, &c.


“ A native grace
“ Sat fair-proportion'd on her polish'd limbs,
“ Veil'd in a simple robe, their best attire,
“ Beyond the pomp of dress: for loveliness
“ Needs not the foreign aid of ornament;
“ But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.”

THOMSON.

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1800.



MAID OF THE HAMLET

IN TWO VOLUMES

CHAPTER I

It was a fine morning in the month of May, and the sun shone brightly on the green fields of the hamlet of Hamlet. The air was fresh and cool, and the birds were singing merrily in the trees. A young man, of about twenty years of age, was walking alone in a path that led through the fields. He was dressed in a simple, but neat, suit of clothes, and he had a serious expression on his face. As he walked, he was thinking of the events of the day before, and of the people who had been at the village fair. He had seen a young woman, of about the same age as himself, who had been very beautiful and very kind. She had been sitting under a tree, and she had been looking at him with a smile. He had been looking at her for some time, and he had been thinking of her very much. He had been wondering who she was, and where she came from. He had been thinking of her very much, and he had been wondering if he should go and see her again. He had been thinking of her very much, and he had been wondering if he should go and see her again.

As he walked, he was thinking of the events of the day before, and of the people who had been at the village fair. He had seen a young woman, of about the same age as himself, who had been very beautiful and very kind. She had been sitting under a tree, and she had been looking at him with a smile. He had been looking at her for some time, and he had been thinking of her very much. He had been wondering who she was, and where she came from. He had been thinking of her very much, and he had been wondering if he should go and see her again. He had been thinking of her very much, and he had been wondering if he should go and see her again.

PRINTED AT THE
PRESS OF THE
FOR WILLIAM LANE, LONDON, E.C.

1890.



MAID OF THE HAMLET.



CHAP. I.

“ Thou hast been

“ As one in suffering all, that suffers nothing :

“ A man who Fortune's buffets and rewards

“ Has ta'en with equal thanks ; and blest are they

“ Whose blood and judgment mingled are so well,

“ That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger,

“ To sound what stop she pleases.”

SHAKSPEARE.

AGE, the end of all wishes and pursuits,
is the period least fitted to encounter
affliction. Sweetly, benignly, should the
gale of prosperity breathe along the vale

of years, when the fruit, meliorated by time, on the least rude blast is ready to drop and perish from the tree of life.

Yet if that Power (whose ways, however dark and intricate they may appear, are still directed by wisdom and by goodness) should allow calamity to pursue us even to the very brink of the grave, there are resources which can console and mitigate, and render our situation not utterly cheerless.

These resources are furnished by the memory, which can look back without dismay, and by the mind which, placing a firm reliance upon Providence, submits with patience and fortitude to its decrees.

Mr. Belmore, the descendant of a respectable family, and possessor of a fine estate in the inland part of Kent, was verging towards his fiftieth year, when he beheld

beheld a prospect of losing that fortune which he had long enjoyed (to the benefit of the poor and friendless) by a distant connexion laying claim to it, in consequence of the unexpected discovery of some long-hidden papers.

Mr. Belmore was inclined to think the pretensions of this new claimant inadequate to his own: he endeavoured, however, to be prepared for the worst.

The management of the law-suit these pretensions occasioned, he entrusted to an agent in London; the infirmities of his constitution, and a retired temper, rendering him averse to going thither, to abide the issue.

Whatever this issue was, he trusted he should bear it with composure.—“If the Almighty should be pleased to continue to me,” he cried, “what I now consider my

rightful patrimony—may he also continue to me a disposition to do good with it to others! If not—if it should be his divine will to deprive me of it, may he in return give to me fortitude that cannot be shaken, content that cannot be destroyed! these are permanent treasures far exceeding any I can lose. These will give

‘What nothing earthly gives or can destroy,

‘The soul’s calm sun-shine and eternal joy.’

But, notwithstanding his resolution, he sensibly felt for a lovely blossom, which bloomed and expanded beneath the fostering shade of tenderness he had afforded it. This was a female orphan, consigned to his care by two of his dearest friends. He had never married; yet his heart was no stranger to the fervour and delicacy of an hopeless affection, and the native tenderness

derness of his disposition, imbibed into his bosom feelings congenial to paternal ones.

The young Matilda amply recompensed his care. Scarcely had her eyes opened to the light, ere she was deprived of both her parents, and thrown upon him entirely for protection, which he extended in such a manner as to excite her warmest gratitude, and create for him an affection, bordering on enthusiasm. His slightest wish had to her the nature of a command; and to please him, was her highest felicity: with justice he has often called her his little Cherub, kindly given to diminish his earthly cares.

Matilda, though educated in retirement, was brought up with elegance. She was early instructed in every accomplishment befitting her sex and future expectations, and to those accomplishments united

a graceful demeanour and insinuating address.

“ Her shape was all that thought can frame

“ Of elegance and grace,

“ And heav’n the beauties of her mind

“ Reflected in her face.”

WATKINS.

That face, though it could not boast of exact symmetry of features, possessed a sensibility and animation which rendered it interesting and attractive in the extreme; her large blue eyes rendered language scarcely necessary to explain her feelings, and her fine auburn hair gave additional charms to the snowy forehead and glowing cheek o’er which it carelessly wantoned.

Though inexperienced, she was not ignorant of the world; a well-chosen collection of books, read with attention, had expanded her mental powers, and matured her

her understanding: they acquainted her with the uncertainty of every thing earthly, with the shame and horror attendant on vice, and the involuntary reverence paid to virtue.

Alive to compassion, unaffected in manners, pure in her principles, and possessed of all the liveliness of youth, with sufficient discretion to temper and confine it within the bounds of propriety, was Matilda.

'Twas for this adopted child of his affections Belmore keenly felt. Old and infirm as he was himself, he still retained that dauntless resolution which could have enabled him to bear the storm of adversity without shrinking; but when he reflected she must be torn from the shade where she had so long flourished, and be exposed perhaps hereafter to all the bleakness of cold

cold and cheerless poverty (for, if deprived of his estate, he could not do more than support her during his life), he found himself overpowered, and yielded to—what shall it be termed—to pity, to sensibility, to the grateful weakness of humanity.—“ Was a man only to suffer himself (he has often said), I see not the mighty matter of his becoming a philosopher; it is his feeling for others gives sharpness to the arrows of calamity, and wrings his heart with anguish.”

All forebodings of evil, however, he discouraged, yet without encouraging hopes too sanguine. To raise our expectations when so liable to disappointment, he knew to be ridiculous; yet to anticipate evil, betrayed a gloominess of temper and distrust of Providence, equally repugnant to his feelings.

Matilda

Matilda neither wholly excluded fear, nor too freely indulged hope; nor was she without some little anxiety to learn the decision of the suit.

Before we proceed farther in the narrative, we think it necessary to make a slight digression, to relate some particulars of Matilda's parents, which will be found requisite hereafter.

CHAP. II.

“ Thus pouring comfort on his soul,
“ Even with her latest breath,
“ She gave one parting fond embrace,
“ And clos'd her eyes in death !”

HERMIT OF WARKWORTH.

BEAUTY and innocence was the only portion of Lucinda Harley; youth and courage, the only patrimony of Stanley. He was the son of a veteran, and from infancy trained to arms. He saw Lucinda accidentally, and the admiration with which

which he beheld her, ripened into a tender affection, upon a mere intimate acquaintance. She was poor, like himself; and, like himself, an orphan: for he early lost his parents. He compared their respective situations, and thought they could do no better than unite, and mutually try to alleviate the cares of each other. He wooed her, not like a modern beau, with insipidity and languor, but with sincerity and ardour. Her blameless heart soon became his: she was too artless, either to wish, or be able to dissemble the influence he acquired over it; and they pledged their irrevocable vows; and were, though not rich, perhaps as happy a pair as ever entered the temple of Hymen. Stanley was naturally impetuous; the gentleness of Lucinda restrained his violence, which only sprung from an excess of intrepidity,

while her weakness was supported by his bravery.

Belmore, his bosom friend, kindly assisted him in procuring a commission in the regiment in which he himself served; but while the animated glowings of benevolence were his, he was a prey to concealed pangs that deadened every source of comfort. Never before accustomed to a long communication with the fair-sex, he found himself surprised into admiration by the gentleness and beauty of Lucinda; and deceived by imagining he was only paying the deference due to her virtues, he found too late the incurable anguish of hopeless affection must be his.

Soon after Stanley had entered the regiment, it was ordered to America, then at war with France, where the two friends signalized themselves frequently, and were
honoured

honoured with flattering testimonies of approbation. During this period, Lucinda became the enraptured mother of two beautiful babes, a boy and a girl. Those little cherubs added to their felicity, and, if possible, increased the affection she and her husband entertained for each other, which had ever *indeed* something enthusiastic in it.

But, alas! how evanescent is human bliss!

The French, in conjunction with the Indians, watched an opportunity one day (while a number of the British officers and soldiers not expecting an attack, in consequence of a finesse of the enemy were absent from it, in pursuit of the game with which the neighbouring woods abounded) to attack the camp. The consternation into which this measure threw those who remained within it may be easier conceived than

than described; but soon recollecting themselves, and animated by their native spirit, they rallied, and resolved, if they fell, to sell their lives dearly.

The alarm soon reached the absent party, amongst whom were Stanley and Belmore. All hastened to the scene of action; and, with the timely succour they afforded, the enemy was repulsed and pursued to a considerable distance.

Stanley, eager to behold and calm the apprehensions of his Lucinda, hastened to her the moment he returned to the camp; his cheeks glowing with the exultation of triumph, his heart fraught with gratitude to heaven for her preservation from the horrors which but a few minutes before had threatened her; the big tear of transport glistening in his eye. Belmore met and joined him; they entered his tent together,

gether, and found Lucinda, with her infant upon the ground, in a state of insensibility. Stanley knelt beside her; he raised her; he called upon her to revive; he whispered in the tenderest accents, danger was no more. The sound of his voice recalled her to life. "Ah! Stanley," she cried, "do I live once more to see you?" Belmore assisted him in supporting her to a seat; "Revive, my love," said Stanley; "all cause for apprehension is over." "Alas!" exclaimed she, "danger is over, but comfort can never, never more return." "Say not so, my Lucinda," cried he, "conquest and security are our ours again." "But my boy," exclaimed she, "is lost for ever!" Stanley started with horror. "He is murdered," said she, "and I cannot survive him!" "Do you not dream,?" cried he, gazing at her, with terror. "Oh! would

would to heaven I did!" cried she, raising her eyes with agony; "but he is gone, my Stanley, and shortly must I follow."—— Stanley, still believing her senses bewildered by terror, demanded an explanation of her words, which she accordingly gave him, in a manner that left him no room to doubt the truth of what she attested; and he fell to the ground, overpowered by terror. "Merciful God!" cried he, "any stroke but this I think I could have borne. My child, first pledge of my love, my little smiling infant, who so fondly prattled to me this morning--lost, murdered--his limbs barbarously torn! it is ——"

The violence of his grief prevented farther utterance, and he wept aloud. Belmore flew to him; "Leave me," cried he: then finding the trembling hand of Belmore on his, "Alas!" cried he, "my
Belmore,

Belmore, the feelings of nature, my beautiful boy—”

The maid who attended the child, had been rambling about with some of the soldiers' wives; and as she could not be found, it was conjectured (but too justly) that she and the child had fallen into the hands of the Indians, who think mercy to prisoners degrading.—“ My Stanley, my husband,” cried Lucinda, “ Oh! do not, by such anguish, render the approaches of death more dreadful.” Stanley started up at these words, with phrenzy in his looks and manner, and enquired what she meant,

She briefly informed him. “ The shock I received robs me of life,” cried she: cease to distress me by your sorrow. Console, fortify me to bear resignedly a separation from you, so loved, so valued.”—

Stanley

Stanley wildly threw himself at her feet; Belmore knelt also; each grasped a hand: the tears of Lucinda fell; joining their hands she pressed them between hers. "Comfort, my Stanley, kind compassionate Belmore; bid him live to protect the legacy Lucinda leaves him. Early my infant loses a parent; but amply, most amply, I trust and believe her loss will be supplied. Your tender care will not, I am certain, be wanting," addressing herself to Belmore: "as you regarded me, you will now regard my babe, and transfer to her, if she grows up to merit it, that friendship which her mother was proud to think you felt for her."—"Yes, most amiable of women," said Belmore, fervently clasping his hands together, "I here most solemnly promise to cherish her during life; and may heaven prosper me only as I serve her!"

Lucinda

Lucinda grew weaker: to please her husband, she permitted the surgeon of the regiment to attend her; but she had no hopes of recovering from the shock she had received, nor would she flatter them with any.

A few days after the loss of her son, supported by Stanley and Belmore, and after pouring forth a fervent petition to heaven for their felicity and the welfare of her infant, she pressed their united hands to her blameless bosom; and laying her cold cheek to Stanley's, sighed out her existence.

Thus expired the gentlest of her sex; a woman, whose heart ever panted to do good, whose tongue never uttered a word that could wound or distress. Young and innocent, she sunk, followed with unceasing regret to the grave.

Stanley's

Stanley's grief was not violent; his was the settled sorrow of despair. He spoke not, he wept not; speechless was his grief, for language had not power to do it justice. The faithful partner of his heart, the sweet solace of all his sorrows, was gone, and with her his earthly happiness had expired.

The grief of Belmore was scarcely less exquisite; his felicity had received a mortal wound. He not only suffered for himself, but for the anguish of his friend. Speedily must he have sunk under the poignancy of his feelings, had not the dying request of Lucinda forcibly recurred to his recollection, with the solemn promise he had given her; he therefore resolved to combat despair, to rise from the lethargy of affliction, and be the guardian of her infant daughter, who he had too much
reason

reason to think would soon lose her only natural protector.

Some of the soldiers' wives performed the last rites of decency to Lucinda; and Stanley and Belmore watched with agonizing stillness beside her loved remains.

Belmore had no power to oppose the resolution of the wretched Stanley; his incoherent expressions, his faltering tongue, were ill qualified to persuade.

The time at length arrived for consigning her to the grave; a few soldiers came to bear the body to the destined spot. It was on a cold damp evening in November; the wind whistled with a melancholy hoarseness, every thing seemed expressive of sympathetic horror.

At the sound of their feet Stanley started, and, clasping his hands together, flew from the place.

Belmore

Belmore turned sick; he tottered, he averted his face; in spite of his efforts tears burst from him.

Stanley heard his emotions; he walked softly to him: "Oh! Belmore, my Belmore," he said in broken accents, "this concern——She was an angel indeed—so kind, so gentle! Dear lost Lucinda!"

The soldiers were now quitting the tent with the sacred remains. Stanley sprang forward: "Oh, stop," cried he, gasping for breath, "stop but for one moment; do not so soon tear her from me, darling of my soul! wife of my heart! and is it thus we part for ever!—"

Pale, feeble, overpowered, he fell on the bosom of Belmore. Hours they continued together, equally incapable of utterance or motion.

Stanley,

Stanley, at length starting, proposed visiting the new-made grave. Belmore complied. They tottered to it—the night was far advanced, and the morning dawned ere they quitted the cheerless, solitary spot.

The senses of Stanley appeared stupified. Belmore led him to the tent. Here his sensibility soon returned; and he thus addressed Belmore:

“ Alas! my Belmore, I would, were it possible, avoid giving you additional pain; but I find myself incapable of supporting this last dreadful blow, which has totally destroyed all my earthly happiness, and cannot conceal from you the conviction I feel of being soon taken from this world: yes, a secret Power whispers to my heart, I shall soon follow my beloved.”

“ Oh!

“ Oh! Belmore, your integrity, the sincerity of your friendship, I ever, next to the possession of my Lucinda, esteemed the most precious blessing I possessed.—Confiding in its still unabated ardour, I consign to your protection the sole remains of Stanley and Lucinda; a parting legacy, which I am convinced will be most tenderly cherished.”

“ My little cherub in you will recover all she now loses. My blessing is all I have to leave her. May that, with the Almighty’s, light upon her innocent head! Portionless she is committed to you.—To a fordid mind I might apologize; but to you—yes, Belmore, I perceive your generous warmth, and know that to succour indigence is your highest gratification. You will tell her of her mother’s virtues, and teach her to resemble that departed angel

angel.—Adieu, most excellent of men!—
I feel weaker, and even converse grows
painful. By the side of Lucinda let me
repose; and now farewell, my friend, my
brother, brother of my affections!”

In a short time he expired. The whole,
the valuable, the precious charge of his or-
phan now devolved to Belmore; who, sti-
mulated by the trust, exerted all his forti-
tude, and with a melancholy composure
attended him to the grave.—

Yet, alas! every shot that was fired over
it, went through his heart. He could not
support the scene, and, hastily retreating,
returned to the tent, where the young
Matilda lay in undisturbed repose. He
kneeled beside her; he listened to her gen-
tle respirations. He folded his hands with
an enthusiasm of tenderness together; and,
looking up to Heaven, “Yes,” exclaimed

he, " I will ever love and cherish thee !
Life itself will be less estimable than thee !
Thou shalt be the darling of my heart,
the adopted child of my affections. I will
look forward to receiving from thy hands,
balm for every human woe. And, sup-
ported and comforted by thee, I may yet
perhaps sink in a happy old-age to the
slumbers of the grave."

His regiment shortly returned to Eu-
rope. Matilda, then about one year old,
was attended thither by the woman who
had nursed her since her mother's death.

On his arrival in England, Belmore
quitted the army. He had an affluent for-
tune, as has already been mentioned, and
retired to his seat with a determination of
living in retirement till Matilda grew up,
and thus devote himself to the delightful
office of superintending her education ;
and

and with a rapture undecribeable, he witnessed the beauties of her mind and form gradually expanding.

Their domestic happiness was now, however, interrupted by the before-mentioned suit. If it went against him, he must relinquish all the luxuries of life; and above all, that sweetest luxury, contributing to the prosperity of his fellow-creatures, as his power would be then so diminished, that good wishes would be almost all he should have to bestow.

His grief for Matilda exceeded any he felt for himself; nor could he suppress some painful emotions at the idea of beholding her reduced from a state of independence, to one bordering on penury.

CHAP. III.

- " And therefore wert thou bred to virtuous knowledge,
" And wisdom early planted in thy soul,
" That thou mightst know to rule thy fiery passions,
" To bind their rage, and stay their headlong course ;
" To bear with accidents, and every change
" Of various life—to struggle with adversity."

ROWE'S ULYSSES.

AS the fuit drew towards a conclusion, Mr. Belmore and Matilda felt involuntarily agitated, and ardently wished to be relieved from a state of suspense, perhaps of all others the most unpleasant.

While

While at breakfast, one morning, a letter was brought to Mr. Belmore which terminated the anxiety inseparable from this state. It contained the following lines:

“ SIR,

“ Affured of the reliance, and thankful for the confidence, you placed on my integrity; and which, if inclined to investigate, you will find not misplaced; it is with the deepest regret I acquaint you, the suit was yesterday determined in favour of the Plaintiff, who clearly proved his right to the litigated estate, by his connexion with an elder branch of the family.

“ Though convinced of the justice, I own I cannot avoid lamenting the issue of this decision.

“ To condole with you, or preach patience, I know would be impertinent. The

steadiness of your mind, and certainty that every event happens for the best, will better reconcile you to the loss you have sustained than the most elaborate discourse.

“ I transmit the bill of costs, and a clear account of the expences incurred by this suit ; at the same time request you will not hurry yourself to satisfy those demands, as the time which is most convenient to you, will be most agreeable to me. And now, Sir, with unfeigned good wishes for your welfare, allow me to subscribe myself

“ Your very obedient,

“ Humble servant,

March 27.

“ WILLIAM MANSON.”

Belmore was for some moments silent :
the shock his hopes and expectations had
received,

received, for a while overpowered his faculties, and the trembling Matilda had not resolution to speak.

Starting, however, from the situation into which the first tumults of surprise and disappointment had flung him, his reason and fortitude in their full vigour soon returned : he felt concerned for the weakness he had betrayed ; and, rising from his chair, fervently exclaimed, raising his eyes to Heaven, " Father, thy will be done !" then put the letter into Matilda's hand ; and, walking about the room, soon regained the serenity and firmness which ever adheres to virtue.

Matilda cast her fearful eyes upon the letter ; and though prepared for the worst, as she perused it, her colour fled : it dropped from her trembling hand, and she burst into an agony of tears.

Mr. Belmore flew, and kindly pressed her to his bosom. "Oh! my Matilda," he cried, "be comforted, be composed." He did not chide her tears, he did not endeavour to suppress them; they would, he knew, relieve her swelling heart.

He made allowances for the feelings of a youthful mind, unaccustomed to adversity; he knew how severe the first shock of disappointment was.

"Be serene, my child", he said, tenderly caressing her. "Young and innocent, you may yet see many, many prosperous days."

"Ah! my friend, my parent, my benefactor," replied she, raising her head from his bosom, "mistake me not; imagine not these tears are shed upon my account. No, no; it is not any selfish consideration occasions this regret. No, it is for you I mourn;

mourn ; for you, kindest, dearest, most reverend of men."

"Dismiss your regrets then upon my account (he eagerly exclaimed). I have not lived to this advanced period, nor observed the various changes and chances which daily happen in life, without being able to bear this vicissitude with calmness ; without being able to bear what the Almighty, for the wisest purposes (to prevent too great an attachment to a being which sooner or later we must resign), has decreed that all who inhabit this great globe should be liable to, disappointment. Instead of murmuring at sharing the common lot of humanity, I bless that goodness which has not deprived me of all ; and wish to prove my gratitude for the comforts I still retain, by exerting myself to enjoy the blessings still within my reach, and those pleasures
c 5 befitting

befitting my altered circumstances. But retire to your room, my love (continued he, seeing her so agitated she could scarcely stand), and try to compose yourself; you shall then return to me, and we will mutually arrange a plan for our future conduct."

"Oh! you are kind, kind," said she, still sobbing; "and I would even beg to preserve you from want!"

"I have not a doubt of your tender affection, indeed my Matilda," he replied, "nor that it would lead you to make the most painful exertions on my account; but I trust I shall never be obliged to put it to too severe a test: true, the narrow income to which I am now reduced, will compel us to relinquish luxuries; but, by proper economy, it will furnish us with all that is needful for nature and convenience."

He

He then insisted on her going to her chamber, as he perceived she was too much oppressed, at present, to receive comfort from his conversation. But, acquainted as he was with her soft, yielding temper, he knew that when the first emotions of disappointment had subsided, she would eagerly return to him, listen to his arguments, and imbibe from them the consolation they were meant to convey.

He then sat down seriously to consider how he was to act; and the result of his deliberations was, a determination of making immediate preparations for his departure from Woodford, and discharging the demands incurred by the law-suit; for, though the lawyer's request might be esteemed a friendly one, Mr. Belmore was the last man in the world who considered permission to remain in debt an obligation.

His debt to him was the only one he owed; so that the little he yet retained was literally his own. The whole indeed was trifling—just sufficient to enable him to live with some degree of comfort in an humble situation. From the commencement of the suit he had been looking out and enquiring for a cheap habitation, that, in case things turned out as they had now done, he might be able to procure without any difficulty a dwelling that would answer for him.

Such a dwelling he had lately heard of; one that from the description he had received of it, was exactly what he wished for; being small, yet commodious, and retired, though in the neighbourhood of many honest families. It was situated in Herefordshire; and as he had already consulted Matilda relative to it, and found her inclination

nation corresponded with his, he resolved on writing this day to secure and have it prepared for their reception.

He entertained no apprehensions of not being able to reconcile Matilda to the humble sphere she must hereafter move in. He knew she was not vain; and, though high-minded, not ambitious of those distinctions on the attainment of which so many place their happiness.

CHAP. IV.

“ ——— Superior to ambition, we
“ Would learn the private virtues, how to glide
“ Thro’ shades and plains, along the smoothest
“ ——— Stream ———
“ Of rural life.”

THOMSON.

MATILDA repaired to her chamber under the utmost perturbation and distress of mind; an unrestrained effusion of tears, however, lightened the oppression of her heart, and a soft melancholy by degrees succeeded to the emotions that had so painfully agitated her.

As

As she regained her composure, she began to regret the little fortitude she had displayed; and that, instead of endeavouring to mitigate the troubles of her benefactor, she had, in all probability, increased them by the sorrow she gave way to.

This idea was sufficient to animate her to exertion, and her spirits and resolution accordingly returned.

"Yes," she cried, "I will endeavour to banish all useless regrets; all feelings that could prevent me from acting in such a manner, as may perhaps lighten his cares and render this reverse of fortune more supportable to him. O God!" she continued, with uplifted hands, "strengthen my efforts and render me capable of giving comfort to him. Permit me—permit me, I entreat thee, to requite, in some degree, the numerous obligations he has conferred

ferred upon me, by giving to me the power of adding to his happiness!—Oh! enable the creature who has lived upon his bounty, who has been fashioned by his precepts, to prove that neither tenderness nor instructions have been thrown away!”——

Still trying to fortify her mind, she continued in her chamber till summoned to dinner, where, with an enlivened countenance, she returned the caresses of Mr. Belmore.

When the servants retired—“Now, my Matilda,” said he, “I thank you, thank you for those exertions which have restored you to yourself, and given to me a convincing proof of your affection.” Then, in words of the sweetest tenderness, he communicated the intentions he had formed during her absence. He flattered her, by asking her approbation; he desired her to
point

point out whatever she approved, or disliked; said she should be his little pilot, and steer him again to happiness and peace.

The delighted girl, kissing his hand, with transport exclaimed, "Ah! dearest Sir, you are too good to me, in asking my opinion: but, since you have condescended to do so, let me for once assure you I can have no dislike—no choice but yours."

When by his persuasive eloquence he had established the tranquillity of Matilda, he proposed a ramble, as the evening was extremely fine; that, while enjoying the serenity of the weather, he might more forcibly expatiate on the blessings yet within their reach; and pointing out the various beauties which surrounded them, paint the pleasures of those destined by Providence to a middling

middling sphere, and to an intimate and uninterrupted acquaintance with the works of nature.

As they pursued their walk, he illustrated his discourse with a number of anecdotes, which knowledge and acquaintance with mankind had given him an opportunity of acquiring; sedulously endeavouring to prove that the "cool sequestered vale of life," was the situation in which men had the best chance of enjoying happiness. "Was this more generally believed," said he, "what murmurs, what discontent, what misery would be avoided! But mankind, too apt to be misled by appearances, permit their reason to be blinded, and waste that time which, if properly applied, might procure them real happiness in a pursuit after rank and riches, which, if they gave them-

selves

themselves leisure to examine into the condition of those who possessed them, or had the power of reading their hearts, they would often find so far from conferring felicity, were productive of sorrows and vices more calculated to excite compassion and contempt than admiration and envy."

"The vain and ambitious, however, will not be persuaded that happiness can be enjoyed in an humble life. That it can, how forcibly does that young girl (glancing at a milk-maid who passed, gayly singing, with her pail under her arm, as he spoke) demonstrate! how bright is the rose upon her cheek! how smooth is her brow! neither care nor sorrow can be traced in her countenance. How different from these which are daily to be met with in the circles of fashion—the regions of dissipation!

"So

"So convinced am I of the truth of what I have asserted, that I think

' _____ of men,
' The happiest he, who far from public rage,
' _____ with a choice few retir'd,
' Drinks the pure pleasures of the rural life.'

Matilda soothed, comforted, and delighted with his conversation, hung upon his arm, catching every word. "Best of beings," she softly whispered, "ever loved, ever revered!"

"They were now in the midst of some neat cottages, which they stopped to examine. "We may perhaps from these," said Mr. Belmore, "select hints for rendering our own more comfortable: the country in which it is situated is delightful, and nothing within my power shall be left undone that can render it a pleasant habitation for my

my Matilda; a habitation in which, like her own bosom, I trust she may ever find happiness and content."

Matilda's heart was too full to permit her to thank him in any other manner than by her looks, for his tenderness to her.

They returned home, and chatted at supper with their usual cheerfulness and tranquillity. The uneasiness that (notwithstanding Matilda's efforts to banish it) had lurked in her bosom, was removed by the soothing eloquence of Mr. Belmore, and the resolution with which he supported the reverse in his fortune; and he was inexpressibly delighted by the exertions he saw she made, exertions which would enable her to enjoy the blessings yet within her reach.

CHAP. V.

“ A sudden damp has seiz’d my spirits,

“ And, like a heavy night,

“ Hangs on their active springs.”

DRYDEN’S DUKE OF GUISE.

THE next morning, just as Mr. Belmore and Matilda had entered the breakfast-parlour, they saw two men galloping up the avenue, who alight on reaching the house; and, inquiring for Mr. Belmore, were conducted to him.

They

They introduced themselves to him as the steward and attorney of Sir James Melbourne, his successful kinsman, come to take possession in his name, and obtain a knowledge of the tenants, &c. The steward delivered a letter to Mr. Belmore from his master; the contents of which were as follow:

“ TO JOHN BELMORE, ESQ.

“ SIR,

“ I suppose Mr. Manson has already acquainted you of the decision, which was carried hollow in my favour. I should now condole with you on your misfortune; but as that would be something like repining at my own success, which would be a very ungrateful affair, I hold it better to say nothing.

“ Though

“ Though faith I hear you are a very honest fellow, and I should be very sorry for your losing your fortune, if any one but myself had got it : I am a plain-speaking man, Mr. Belmore, so you need not be offended at what I say ; for, putting yourself in my case, and hearing such a thing belonged to you, I take it you would be as eager as your neighbours to claim it.

“ I shall not go down to the country for five weeks, at least ; so I beg you may stay in the house, and not hurry yourself on my account ; as, by your staying in it till then, it will be better aired against I go down. The gentlemen I have sent will have an eye to every thing, and adjust all matters with you.

“ I hear there is plenty of game on the land ; as I will not come up to town next winter, I shall bring down brave store of
powder

powder and shot. My nephew says, one would think I was going to blow up the rock of Gibraltar. No poachers, I hope, on the ground—will not suffer them—keen as a fox, scout them all; string them up like scarecrows, or send them to Bridewell to look like starved weasels.

“ I am in great haste; so, desiring you may give the rent-roll to Mr. Jones, I am, with much esteem,

“ Yours,

Brook street,
March 28.

“ JAMES MELBOURN.”

This letter extorted a smile from Mr. Belmore. It was indeed truly characteristic of the person who wrote it. The Baronet, an only child, was brought up with such false indulgence, that instead of possessing the advantages his fortune, ample even before the late addition to it, gave him the

means of acquiring, he was illiberal in his notions, unpolished in his manners, fordid in his principles, fond of his own gratifications; and the only perfection he had was that of sincerity: if indeed that could be called a perfection which prompted him to divulge, without the smallest hesitation or consideration about the feelings of others, his sentiments and opinion upon every occasion.

After breakfast Mr. Belmore settled every thing that was necessary with the attorney and steward, and gave to them all the papers that still remained in his hands relative to the estate.

By the orders of the Baronet they were to be lodged and remain in the house till he came to it. Mr. Belmore could not avoid thinking this conduct indelicate: he forbore, however, making any comment upon it, but resolved to depart with all possible

possible expedition to another habitation, as he did not much relish Sir James's request of continuing in his house longer than was necessary; that, in consequence of his doing so, the house might be better aired for his reception.

Matilda was no less impatient than he was to be gone, as she longed to leave a place which now filled her with sorrow and regret.

No more her heart dilated with pleasure at wandering through the beautiful scenery surrounding Woodford; those venerable shades which had so often sheltered her from a meridian sun; those verdant meadows, where in early childhood she had so often rambled with her little play-fellows:

———— a sportive train,
To gather king-cups ————
And prink their hair with daisies.

The idea of their being lost to him who had so long constituted her happiness, rendered them now incapable of inspiring her with any other feelings than those of grief and melancholy.

As soon as could be expected, a letter arrived from the person to whom Mr. Belmore had written about the house in Herefordshire, informing him, agreeable to his directions he had taken it for him, and would have it prepared immediately for his reception.

Though Mr. Belmore and Matilda had already made preparations for their departure, they found they could not with convenience leave Woodford before the expiration of a fortnight.

As Matilda, in the course of her packing, reviewed the numerous expensive ornaments she had received from Mr. Belmore, she
could

could not suppress a sigh at the idea of the pain a disposition like his must sometimes involuntarily feel at not being able to gratify its generous and benevolent feelings.—

“ Alas !” she cried, “ how many children of sorrow will have reason to lament this change in his circumstances !”

The night preceding her departure she retired early from the supper-parlour to an apartment hitherto considered as her dressing room. Here with a heavy heart she lingered at a window which commanded an extensive and beautiful prospect, and overlooked a shrubbery that owed its principal elegance and beauty to her superintending care. She herself attended the plants, set many of them with her own hand, and felt an inexpressible happiness at observing their bloom and vivid buds, expanding to the gentle breath of spring. In this shrub-

very various improvements had been designed by Mr. Belmore. He promised Matilda, that when the plants had attained a more mature state, a temple should be erected to the powers of harmony and friendship, where at stated periods she should assemble those she most liked and esteemed.

In retrospecting the hour in which this promise had been made, and the occurrences which had since happened to prevent it from being fulfilled, and in contemplating the beloved spot she was going in all probability to quit for ever, she found her spirits forsaking her.

In this situation Mr. Belmore surprised and watched her for some moments, without being perceived. He easily penetrated into her feelings, and pressed her to his bosom ere she was aware of his approach.

Her

Her trickling tears, her tremulous voice, denoted how inadequate efforts of consolation would be at present. He accordingly led her in silence to her chamber, where, kissing her cheek, he desired she would retire to rest, as their journey must be commenced at an early hour, and then repaired to his own.

CHAP. VI.

" Good heav'n! what sorrows gloom'd that parting day,
" That call'd them from their native walks away."

GOLDSMITH'S DESERTED VILLAGE.

THE slumbers of Mr. Belmore were not as tranquil this night as usual: notwithstanding all his fortitude and resignation, he could not avoid feeling a tender regret, amounting almost to anguish, at the idea of leaving that mansion in which the wounds of an almost broken heart had first been

been closed, by meditating on the important duties he had to perform in fulfilling his promise to his departed friends; that mansion where he had fostered a hope of breathing his last, and of giving permanency to the felicity of Matilda by uniting her to some worthy man, who should join with her in soothing the closing hours of his existence.

Sweet conscious virtue however prevented his sinking beneath the disappointment.

“ As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
“ Swells from the vale, and mid-way leaves the storm,
“ Tho’ round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
“ Eternal sun-shine settles on his head.”

GOLDSMITH’S DESERTED VILLAGE.

The chaise was early at the door; Matilda was prepared, and stepped into it, in silence; Mr. Belmore followed her: both, oppressed

with similar feelings, were equally silent during the course of many miles, when, looking from the window, he found the intervening hills had totally excluded Woodford from their view.

Its poor inhabitants mourned, with the utmost bitterness, the loss they were about sustaining by being deprived of Mr. Belmore, whose beneficent heart, whose ready hand, had never sent away unaided the poor distressed.

Floods of tears were drawn from Matilda by their artless complaints: the effusions of simple nature are particularly affecting.

Nor was Mr. Belmore less affected by them. He tried, however, to cheer both them and himself, by encouraging a hope of their not having as much reason hereafter to regret

regret his departure from Woodford, as they now apprehended they should.

By degrees, the painful feelings he and Matilda experienced in consequence of the distress of these poor rustics, and the idea of having quitted, in all probability for ever, a place so much endeared to both from long intimacy and many interesting circumstances, softened into a gentle melancholy, which neither prevented their observing nor admiring the various and often richly-diversified prospects that were presented to their view. This was the first long journey Matilda had taken since she was an infant; and Mr. Belmore, who knew how highly he should delight her by doing so, made frequent pauses in it, in order to give her an opportunity of gratifying her curiosity by visiting some places, near

which it led them, that she had read of in history.

The pleasure she derived from those visits was too exquisite for description. The records of departed greatness gave to her imagination more pleasant exercise than the most magnificent modern structure could possibly have done. They awakened the remembrance of former interesting events; they sent her soul back to the days of old, and by a kind of magic brought to her view the exploits, the employments and the pastimes of these days.

A sigh, however, was sometimes caused by a reflection upon the shortness and vanity of life, to which a review of the numerous generations that had so rapidly succeeded each other in the places she visited, involuntarily gave rise. "Like these," she cried to herself, "the children
of

of future years shall pass away, and another race arise," as the poet has said : " we are like the waves of the ocean, like leaves that pass away in the rustling blast, and are quickly succeeded by others.—Oh! how forcibly should this reflection convince us of the folly of devoting our whole time to pursuits that must so soon be terminated, to the utter neglect of those essential to our well-being hereafter !"

After a journey of several days, rendered delightful to Matilda by the little houses and digressions in it, we have already mentioned, they reached their new habitation about the decline of evening, and were highly pleased with its interior; and certain, from what they had heard, they should be equally so with its exterior.

Two domestics, a man and a maid, all Mr. Belmore meant to keep, had preceded them

them to it, and prepared every thing necessary for them.

Supper was served in a few minutes after their arrival; and they retired early to their respective chambers, where fatigue soon closed their eyes.

CHAP. VII.

- “ No palace with a lofty gate he wants,
 “ T’admit the tides of early visitants,
 “ With eager eyes devouring as they pass
 “ The breathing figures of Corinthian brass ;
 “ No statues threaten from high pedestals ;
 “ No *Persian Arras* hides his homely walls.
 “ But easy quiet, a secure retreat,
 “ A harmless life, that knows not how to cheat,
 “ With home-bred plenty the rich owner blest,
 “ And rural pleasures crown his happiness.”

DRYDEN’S VIRGIL.

SIMPLICITY and neatness were conspicuous in Mr. Belmore’s new abode, which was literally a cottage.

It

It contained just a sufficient number of rooms for the accommodation of his little family: but though small, it was, as he had been given to understand, perfectly commodious; and even had it been less comfortable, still its charming situation—in the heart of a beautiful and luxuriant country would have rendered it a desirable residence. It was built in a meadow, hedged with hawthorn, and dotted near the border with old trees. A fine clear stream ran at the bottom, and was crossed by a rustic bridge that led to the road. Along the banks of the stream, the trees, clustering more thickly than elsewhere, formed little groves, in which the song of the nightingale prevailed throughout the summer months. During these months, the white walls of the cottage were almost hidden by the honeysuckle that crept over them, and
diffused

diffused the most balmy fragrance through the apartments.

On one side of the house lay a complete farm-yard, with suitable offices; on the other, a small dairy; and behind it, a garden and orchard; both well stocked, and in excellent condition. In the former, Matilda was much pleased by finding a sequestered seat, where, when the weather was fine, she could either work or read.—It consisted of a bank of moss, elevated on a little mount, scattered over with flowers and shaded by an old thorn. Here, while a distant view of towering mountains and extensive woods delighted the eye, the nearer prospect of a number of neat cottages, forming a small hamlet, cheered the heart, by exhibiting scenes of peace, industry, and contentment.

After breakfast, Mr. Belmore, accompanied by Matilda, walked over his little farm

farm, and both were charmed with the inspection.

This day, every thing relative to their domestic economy was finally arranged.

Mr. Belmore, who by a long residence in the country had acquired a knowledge of farming, resolved to take his land into his own immediate care; and this he knew, by proper attention, would yield every necessary his house required.

Every thing within doors was entrusted to the management of Matilda; and in a short time she hoped to become an excellent housewife. In the interim, she flattered herself, the maid, who was extremely skilful, and promised to produce the best butter and cheese, with the fattest poultry in the neighbourhood, would supply all her deficiencies, and enable her always to have a comfortable home for Mr. Belmore.

Their

Their man was to act as gardener, attendant, &c. and take care of the only horse Mr. Belmore now kept, which had been a present from him to Matilda.

The principal part of Mr. Belmore's library, together with Matilda's piano, a large collection of music, and materials for drawing, were brought to their retreat. Thus provided with constant means of amusement, they entertained no apprehension of ever finding time hang heavy on their hands.

Matilda was highly pleased with the manner they proposed living in, not from any charms novelty gave to it, but from the steadiness and penetration of her mind, which discerned the salutary benefits that could scarcely fail of accruing from a life spent in so serene, so temperate a manner.

The melancholy she felt at her first arrival at the cottage, gradually wore away. Her
spirits

spirits returned, her eyes regained their lustre, her cheeks their bloom; and she felt what indeed she had scarcely before doubted, that content can amply make up for the deficiencies of fortune.

Mr. Belmore experienced equal happiness—a happiness which sprang from his own fortitude and the virtues of her he regarded as his child.

“ Yes,” he has often whispered to himself, while fondly gazing upon her, “ she is all that her mother was; equally lovely, equally amiable. O Stanley! O Lucinda!—dear departed friends! if permitted to review this world, how must you rejoice at the virtues of your orphan! how glory at having given birth to a creature whose conduct will entitle her, like yourselves, to hold a seat amidst the spirits of the blessed!

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

- “ Would I had fall’n upon those happy days
“ That poets celebrate ; those golden times
“ And those Arcadian scenes that Maro sings,
“ And Sidney, warbler of poetic prose !
“ Nymphs were Diana’s then, and swains had hearts
“ That felt their virtues : innocence, it seems,
“ From courts dismiss’d, found shelter in the groves.”

COWPER.

MR. Belmore contrived to conceal his having ever moved in a more exalted sphere than his present one. In consequence of this concealment, none but a few of his rustic neighbours came to pay their compliments

pliments to him. Their evident wish to please, amply compensated for their want of politeness, and their warm invitations proved the delight they should feel from having them accepted.

Amongst these visitors was a Mr. Hillgrove (one of the most respectable farmers in the neighbourhood), and his daughter. He was a healthy-looking man, about fifty, with a countenance expressive of the utmost good-humour, and as hospitable in his disposition as unceremonious in his manner. He shook Mr. Belmore heartily by the hand, said he liked his looks, was glad to have him in his vicinity, hoped they would be on good terms, assured him always of a slice of cut-and-come, and a draught of good ale; called Matilda a pretty chick, and begged she might often favour his daughter with a call, who he thought would be likely to improve by her company.

Miss

Miss Patty Hillgrove's principal charms were derived from youth and a blooming complexion. In her manner there was a kind of shy simplicity, tinged with reserve, which, however, the affability of Matilda soon encouraged her to drop, and she began to chat with familiarity on many trifling subjects, such as Matilda quickly perceived were best suited to her capacity and education.

Mr. Hillgrove and his daughter pressed Mr. Belmore and Matilda much to spend the evening at their house: the former, upon finding them hesitate about accepting his invitation, declared they must either come to him, or he to them. In consequence of this declaration, he and his daughter were invited to return in the evening, and readily consented to do so:—they then separated for some hours.

Mr.

Mr. Belmore easily conjectured Matilda's opinion concerning their visitors. "We must not, however, my dear," said he, "be fastidious: rudeness and vice are indeed ever to be avoided; but the society of those whose manners and dispositions are free from either, may, even with a degree of pleasure, be supported: the reflection how few opportunities those honest people have had of cultivating or adorning their minds, must ever prevent us from ridiculing them. But it is unnecessary to speak thus to you, my love; you, whose good and tender heart would never permit you to indulge wit at the expence of feeling.

The Hillgroves returned very early. Matilda soon found that taciturnity would never distinguish her fair neighbour, whose awkward diffidence being subdued, she gave her tongue free scope; told Matilda of a thousand

thousand anecdotes of her own intimates; how many were on the tapis for matrimony; the reason why one was disappointed in her lover; what another wore at a ball given by the landlord; when such a girl was seen fauntering through a dark walk with a young widower; and the agonies of her intimate friend in not finding the predictions of a fortune-teller fulfilled: in short, Matilda, from the whole tenor of her conversation, perceived that scandal and envy could not only exist out of the air of the metropolis, but even flourish amongst woods and wilds.

Mr. Hillgrove gave a summary account of his neighbours, and ended with the parson, who, he said, was a queer kind of a fellow, whose sermons had the salutary effect of always putting him to sleep.

They staid to supper. Mr. Hillgrove was unbounded in his expressions of regard; declared repeatedly Mr. Belmore was the honestest fellow he ever knew; and at length, with visible reluctance, departed.

Every domestic arrangement being made, time glided on most pleasantly with Mr. Belmore and Matilda; spring, which had commenced with unusual mildness, was now far advanced, and every spot presented something charming to their view—green fields and shady groves and hedges covered with a profusion of blossoms: they rose early, for the purpose of pursuing their various avocations, and enjoying the ethereal mildness of the morning; nor was the silent hour of evening disregarded: they then either walked out, or repaired to the recess in the garden, where they delighted to listen to the responsive thrillings of the retiring birds,

birds, the bleatings of the flocks, and inhale the fragrance wafted from the surrounding flowers.

They at length, according to their promise, went to spend an evening at Mr. Hillgrove's. The walk was but short to his house: they found him at his gate, impatiently watching for them. The moment they appeared, he hastened forward to meet them, and having given them a cordial welcome, he led Mr. Belmore into a parlour, where a few of the neighbouring farmers were assembled to meet him: after which, he conducted Matilda to a summer-house in the garden, where his daughter and half a dozen girls waited tea for her.

He then returned to Mr. Belmore, and while his best ale briskly circulated, "news much older than that ale went round."

Matilda's manner, as well as dress, engaged the critical attention of Miss Patty and her companions, and with difficulty they could shake off the restraint, or conceal the envy the superior elegance of both excited.

Tea-table topics were not forgotten; some of the village belles were pulled to pieces; the discovery of two or three private interviews laughed at; and some of the rural beaux censured for want of taste, because they themselves were not the objects of their admiration. Matilda could not help smiling at the emulation which each betrayed of excelling in volubility of speech; but while she smiled, she secretly lamented that the contagion of scandal and vanity had extended beyond the metropolis, and banished simplicity and innocence from scenes particularly consecrated to them:

— "But,

———— “ But, alas!

“ Scenes rarely grac’d with rural manners, now.”

.....

* “ The rural lass,

“ Whom once her virgin modesty and grace,

“ Her artless manners, and her neat attire,

“ So dignified, that she was hardly less

“ Than the fair shepherdes of old romance—

“ Is seen no more; the character is lost.

“ Her head adorned with lappets pinn’d aloft,

“ And ribbands streaming gay, superbly rais’d,

“ And magnified beyond all human size;

“ Indebted to some smart wig-weavers hand

“ For more than half the tresses it sustains;

“ Her elbows ruffled, and her tott’ring form

“ Ill prop’d upon French heels, she might be deem’d

“ (But that the basket dangling on her arm,

“ Interprets her more truly) of a rank

“ Too proud for dairy-work, or sale of eggs.”

After tea, a walk was proposed, a proposal to which Matilda gladly acceded, and they sallied forth: after rambling about a

considerable time, they sat down on the summit of a rising ground, from whence Matilda beheld several beautiful and extensive prospects; amongst the rest a noble mansion, surrounded by very fine improvements, attracted her attention; and she inquired to whom it belonged.

“That,” said one of the girls, “belongs to Mr. Bromley, who owns most of the adjoining land, and is to be sure one of the handsomest and elegantest men I ever saw!—he has the spirit of a Prince in spending money! and to be sure whoever gets him, will have reason to bless her stars!”

“I can’t conceive,” cried one of her companions, “what can take him so often to Wilcox’s—I can scarcely think it is Miss Bessy attracts him thither; for she neither possesses beauty nor wit, in my opinion.

Matilda, tired of this conversation, proposed continuing their walk; as they pro-

proceeded, Patty Hillgrove, who attached herself to her with an air of vanity, took an opportunity of informing her in a whisper, of the attention she received from Mr. Bromley, and Matilda perceived he was an object of general admiration. As they passed his house, their eyes were directed towards the windows, in hopes of seeing him there, and by their smiles they evinced the satisfaction that would result from his joining them.

Soon after they had passed his house, they entered a lane, thickly shaded with old trees, and terminated by the remains of a stupendous building—a melancholy memento of the inevitable decay attendant on all human productions. This building immediately attracted the attention of Matilda, and she expressed a wish of taking a nearer survey of it. Instead of complying

E 4

with

with this wish, however, her companions manifested a degree of horror and astonishment on hearing it, which not only surprised but alarmed her; and all eagerly clambered over a stile into a neighbouring meadow, and made the best of their way towards the Hamlet: "Lord blefs me!" said Patty, as she again took her arm, "I would not venture to that place for the universe! why, it is there the madman lives, and I dare say he would murder us all." "Madman!" repeated Matilda. "Aye," cried Patty, "and they say he would kill any one that went near him, for it seems he hates all mankind, prowls about by himself, passes his nights amongst the graves, and has frequently been overheard talking in an unintelligible manner to himself." This account excited the curiosity of Matilda. "Did you ever see him?" asked she. "Yes," replied Patty,

" I

“ I met him one day in a meadow. Lord! I was so frightened! I thought every moment he would come up and bite me; so the moment I passed him, I took to my heels, nor never ceased running till I got home.”

“ And pray,” asked Matilda, “ has no one ventured near him, to try whether it was possible his malady could be cured?” “ Oh! yes,” said Patty, “ the Parson went to him one day, but he was affronted, and soon left him; I wanted to know whether he could be put into Bedlam? but the Parson said, No; for as he had done no mischief, there could be no pretext for confining him.”

Matilda's anxiety to learn further particulars of this reputed madman, remained ungratified. Patty and her companions said they knew nothing more concerning him, than they had already told her. They did not forget, however, to caution her against venturing too near his abode.

The party separated on quitting the meadow, and only she and Patty returned to Mr. Hillgrove's, where Mr. Belmore was waiting to attend her home.

He laughed at the description she gave of her companions, and still more at their conversation and designs upon Mr. Bromley, which she repeated; "for which, (said he) he may thank his fortune: was he divested of that, believe me, he would be disregarded: it is his-estate, not himself, is the object they sigh for."

She mentioned the person who had been represented as the terror of the neighbourhood. "Mr. Hillgrove also spoke of him," said Mr. Belmore, "and by what I can gather he is not mad, but cynical; untutored imaginations, however, quickly conjure up a thousand bugbears to affright and torment; but I really think the unhappy

happy man we have been speaking of should create no other sensation in our breasts than compassion?"

Matilda's mind became occupied by the idea of this stranger, for whom she felt sentiments of the liveliest pity; convinced in her own mind, that misery or madness could alone have tempted him to renounce society, and reside in so cheerless, so gloomy a spot as that he inhabited.

CHAP. IX.

“ He makes his heart a prey to black despair ;
“ He eats not, drinks not, sleeps not, has no use
“ Of any thing but thought ; or, if he talks,
“ 'Tis to himself, and then 'tis perfect raving :
“ Then he defies the world, and bids it pass ;
“ Sometimes he gnaws his lips, then draws his mouth
“ Into a scornful smile.”

DRYDEN.

MATILDA rose before Mr. Belmore the next morning, and quitted the house, with an inclination of walking till the breakfast-hour, and thus enjoy the early hour of day—

“ For

“ For sweet is the breath of morn ; her rising sweet,

“ With charm of earliest birds.”——

She crossed the little bridge at the end of the meadow, and then pursued her way as chance directed ; delighted with the melody of the woodland choristers, and the reviving freshness of the air. Solely engrossed by the beautiful scenery about her, she wandered on, till finding herself in a road with which she was unacquainted, she paused to look round for the one she should take, and in doing so, to her extreme consternation, perceived she was close to the melancholy spot where the strange solitary being, who excited both her pity and curiosity, resided.

A sudden panic seized her, and she trembled so she could scarcely move.—

“ Good Heavens!” cried she to herself,

“ what

“ what shall I do, if his reason be really disordered, and he sees me here alone? he may be malicious enough to hurt me.”

She tottered on with as much haste as she could make: ere she had proceeded many yards, she heard the sound of feet behind her, and, involuntarily pausing, she looked back, and to her infinite terror, saw a man, muffled up so oddly, that she immediately conjectured he could be no other than the person she dreaded to encounter. This idea almost overpowered her, and when she attempted to proceed, her limbs shook to such a degree, she had not power to move, and stood ready to sink to the earth.

Her apprehensions, however, were soon relieved. The moment the stranger raised his eyes from the ground, on which they appeared for some minutes bent in gloomy meditation, he started back and hastily retreated

retreated amidst the windings of the Pile. Her strength instantly returned; she sprung forward, and soon regaining the path she had taken from the Cottage, never stopped till she arrived at it.

“ Bless me, child!” cried Mr. Belmore, (who by this time was up and watching for her return), on seeing her breathless and agitated, “ What is the matter?” “ Oh! dear Sir!” exclaimed she, “ I have seen him!” “ Seen who?”—“ I do not know,” replied she; “ but the person they say is mad; and I have been almost frightened out of my life.” “ Out of your wits, you mean,” said Mr. Belmore. “ Why, what a little simpleton are you, to lose your reason because a parcel of silly girls have given you an exaggerated account of him.”

“ I have been very foolish,” said she, as she untied her hat, and seated herself at the
breakfast

breakfast-table; "but I saw him so suddenly, that"— "You could not resist the influence of terror," cried Mr. Belmore.

Curiosity, as well as a hope of being able to convince her there was no cause for this terror, induced Mr. Belmore in the evening to propose their taking the same ramble she had done in the morning. Matilda started—"What!" cried he, "afraid to venture with me?" "O no," said she, smiling, "certainly, there can be no danger."

They accordingly went out, and had nearly approached the ruinous dwelling of the recluse, when Matilda perceived him in a field contiguous to it. She immediately directed Mr. Belmore's eyes to him, and both stopped in order to observe him more attentively. He was still muffled up; but his

his hat which had entirely concealed his face, in the morning, was now raised, and displayed a countenance neither glaring with phrenzy, nor soured with moroseness, but enlivened by youth, and the warm glow of delighted and refined benevolence, which had just been exercised.

The object to whom it had been extended was an emaciated female with two children; the babes were clinging round his knees, and the transported mother with clasped hands, and all the energy of gratitude, was pouring forth her thanks for his bounty. The eyes of Matilda glistened with tears; Mr. Belmore was not less affected by the scene before them than she was. "We have been both mistaken," said he; "neither madness nor misanthropy predominate here." While he spoke, the woman, followed by her children, from whom the stranger

stranger had gently disengaged himself, approached the spot where they stood.—

“Do you live in this country?” asked Mr. Belmore, stopping her. “No, Sir,” returned she, “I was travelling with my children to C——; but sickness seizing me upon the road, here I might have perished, but for the assistance of an angel from Heaven.”

“You mean the gentleman yonder?” said Mr. Belmore. “Yes, Sir; and may the widow’s blessing, and the blessing of innocence, light upon his head!” Matilda put her hand into her pocket; Mr. Belmore gave an assenting smile; and she slipped something into the woman’s hand, whose tears expressed her thanks.

The unknown, after continuing some moments in a thoughtful attitude, suddenly pulled his hat over his face; and, leaving
the

the field, walked hastily along a path that bordered it. "I will try," said Mr. Belmore, "whether he is as unfociable as they represent him to be."

Unavoidably compelled to pass each other, Mr. Belmore turning to him, with much politeness, said,—“Excuse, Sir, this abrupt address; but I cannot neglect the present opportunity of expressing the pleasure I should derive from being permitted to cultivate an intimacy with so near and so amiable a neighbour.”

He started at these words; a haughty air instantaneously overspread his countenance; and, without uttering a word, or even bowing, he retired with precipitancy through an ivy-covered gate, which led to the part of the building that was fitted up for his residence.

Mr.

Mr. Belmore was displeased, and Matilda was shocked by this repulsive disdain.

"I find," said he, "my declaration of being mistaken was rather premature. Some calamities, I suppose, have disgusted him with the world; and, though open to pity, he is a stranger to benevolence, and assumes the rigidity of a Misanthrope."

"But what," cried Matilda, "can be alledged to counterbalance the humanity of the action we have witnessed?"

"I wish not, my dear, to lessen his merit," said Mr. Belmore; "but, in my opinion, half the charms of virtue, consist in the manner in which she performs her duties. I allow him to be generous; but you must allow he never can be pleasing while he assumes the manners of a cynic; if, while succouring one individual, he rails against and sedulously shuns the rest of the species:

species: such charity will by many be imputed to caprice, not feeling; 'tis only the man who struggles against despair, and to pity unites benevolence, that can be deserving of our esteem and admiration."

Matilda's mind was now more than ever occupied by reflexions on the singularity of his behaviour; she wished, and yet she did not know why, to learn the source from whence it originated.

The next day Patty Hillgrove came running into the house; "Lord blefs me!" said she, "I hear you met the madman; did he attempt to bite you?" "No really," replied Matilda, "nor even to speak to me; and I believe he might be met with as much safety, or rather more than your favourite Mr. Bromley."

"Indeed," cried Patty, "I do not believe he is so bad as people have represented him

him to be; but Mr. Bromley himself told me, he wanted nothing but an opportunity to injure one; and assured me, if I ventured near him, he would undoubtedly drag me into some of the old vaults belonging to that monastery he lives in, and bury me alive."

"Then I assure you," said Matilda, "it is not more ridiculous to propogate such absurd reports, than foolish to believe them."

"I do not give half so much credit to them now, indeed," cried Patty, as I used to do; "for I have lately been told he is very good-natured: I heard a story of him this morning, which I will tell you."

"There is a poor old widow, who lives about two miles from our house, to whom my father, from having known her and her husband many years, desired me to give
some

some little relief or other, whenever she came in my way. For these last five weeks I neither saw nor heard any thing of her, which surprised me a good deal, as she used to come very often to us; so this morning I resolved to try whether she was dead or alive. Accordingly I went to her cottage, and who should I see but herself knitting at the door: So, Jenny, said I, how are you? Purely, Madam, says she, thanks be to Heaven. But, O Miss! there is no knowing the ups and downs of this world; and, as the Parson says, one may be in grief this day, and in joy the next: I have been in a peck of troubles since I last saw you, Miss Patty. My poor Jemmy was employed by 'Squire Bromley, about an ornamental building, I think they call it, in the shrubbery, which the 'Squire wanted to have repaired, against some company he expected from London,

London, came down. Well, he hurried all the workmen, and amongst the rest, my poor boy, who, you know, is not very strong, so much, that at last he fell sick from fatigue and the heat of the weather, and took to his bed: this was bringing a heap of troubles upon me, as I had not the means of purchasing for him what he required, and did not like to be always troubling my neighbours with my distresses. Well, one night as I sat outside the cottage-door, crying sadly about him, who should pass by but the gentleman who lives at the Abbey, and who, they say, is out of his mind; though I don't believe no such thing now, I assure you. Well, he had scarcely passed me before he turned back, and asked me in the softest, sweetest voice I ever heard, what was the matter with me?— Though I then thought him mad, I could
not

not for the heart of me refuse telling him, he spoke in such a manner: and to be sure, it was a lucky hour in which I told him; for, before I had well finished what I was saying, he took ten guineas from his purse, and, putting them into my hand, "There," said he, "I shall call again; at present get every necessary advice and assistance for your son." His bounty seemed to me like that of an angel. Jemmy grew better ever since, and every thing now wears a smiling face."

This narrative, aided by the humanity of the incident she had witnessed, prepossessed most strongly the susceptible heart of Matilda in his favour. "And did Mr. Bromley," asked she, "do nothing to relieve the distresses of the poor woman?" "Oh, no," Patty replied, "Mr. Bromley had other things to take up his attention, besides the sorrows of a poor rustic and her son;

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son; his house was full of company; the other gentleman, however, had nothing else to attend to."

"No!" said Matilda, "nothing that could have afforded him half so much delight as administering to the wants of a suffering fellow-creature!"

They soon after separated. "What a pity it is," said Matilda, when left to herself, "that so benevolent a mind should entertain such a dislike to society. The converse of a few congenial beings, could scarcely fail of diverting his melancholy, and though their sympathy could not remove, it might perhaps alleviate his sorrows."

She then took her work, and went to the little sheltered bank in the garden, still occupied in thinking of the unsociable, capricious, yet humane being, she had heard so much of.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

“ Of years scant twenty-five was he,

“ And comely was his face ;

“ His yellow locks, in ringlets free,

“ Hung down his neck with grace.

“ Blue were his eyes, and streams of fire,

“ When angry, from them came ;

“ Not so when urg'd by soft desire,

“ He woo'd the yielding dame.”

OLD ENGLISH BALLADS.

MR. Belmore, who had been superintending his labourers, shortly joined her in her little sequestered retreat. He had not been long seated, when Matilda began to speak of the Misanthrope, for so Mr.

Belmore chose to call the Recluse at the Abbey. He made but a slight reply to what she said concerning him, and changed the discourse by speaking of the pleasures of the country, and the felicities of its inhabitants, of which I had never so perfect a knowledge, said he, as since I came to this country. "Oh! my dear Matilda," continued he, in the fullness of his heart, "as I contemplate the diversified works of creation, my heart expands with ineffable gratitude to the supreme author of them; and I am astonished that man can ever be so forgetful of the blessings surrounding him, as to admit discontent within his heart."

"Certainly," said Matilda, "it is not more calculated to excite wonder than regret, that he can thus poison his enjoyments; but I will not allow you, dear Sir,

to

to drop the subject I commenced, nor stigmatise the poor Misanthrope."

"Do not again begin hostilities," said he, "but be satisfied that I have not before refuted all your arguments in his behalf."

"Excuse me, my dear Sir," replied she, smiling, "as a true woman, I must contend till I am subdued."

"Since you compel me then to speak, I will candidly give my opinion," said Mr. Belmore "What does the title of Misanthrope imply (a title which the person you have spoken of appears to me to merit), but spleen, malice and discontent? feelings utterly subversive of those we should endeavour to cultivate, not only for our own happiness, but the happiness of society: consequently, the man who entertains them is unworthy of our esteem."

"Surely, my dear Sir," cried Matilda, "he cannot be undeserving of esteem who

aids the afflicted—who dries the tears of the widow, and befriends the fatherless: and thus does he do, of whom we are speaking. We, ourselves, beheld an instance of his humanity, which called forth our plaudits; and to day I have heard of another, still more worthy of praise.”

She then related the little tale told her by Patty Hillgrove; and Mr. Belmore was beginning to make some comments upon it, when the servant appeared to inform them dinner was waiting. They then left their embowered retreat, and returned to the cottage to enjoy a frugal repast, rendered delicious by the probity and contentment of their minds.

The alteration in their circumstances was unattended with regret for any of the luxuries they were necessitated to relinquish in consequence of it. They cheerfully submitted

mitted to their fate; and, by so doing, were enabled to enjoy the blessings still within their reach.

Mr. Belmore was, in the most literal acceptance of the word, an Optimist. No vicissitude in life, however painful, could shake his fortitude, convinced as he was, that it was directed by infinite goodness and wisdom. Thus resigned, therefore, to the will of Heaven, and relying on Providence for the protection of Matilda, it was not long after his removal from Woodford, ere his tranquillity and happiness returned like two amiable relatives together.

A few words will suffice to give some account of the Misanthrope, for whom Matilda was so warm an advocate.

There was a susceptibility, as well as a sympathy in Matilda's disposition, which not only made her feel for, but attached

her, in some degree, to all who were unfortunate: the idea, therefore, of his being so, excited her compassion, and created a kind of romantic prepossession in his favour.

To those who are not divested of the delicate sensibilities of nature, who understand the thousand undecipherable feelings that daily agitate a breast of refinement, this will not appear strange.

The Unknown had resided for some months in the country; and by the singularity of his manners, his total seclusion, his distaste to all society, had excited the wonder of the neighbouring rustics, who mutually agreed his reason was disordered.

But there was too great a consistency in his acts of benevolence to permit those whose minds were better cultivated to harbour such an idea; to these it was evident
his

his temper alone had suffered from the poignancy of affliction.

His person was tall, manly, and elegantly proportioned; there was a dignity in his air, which could not fail of commanding respect; and an ease and grace in all his motions, which proved him well educated, and accustomed to elegant society.

Five-and-twenty years was the utmost he appeared to have attained. A gloom, apparently proceeding from secret sorrow, generally clouded his countenance; but after relieving virtue—after drying the tears of poverty, nothing could exceed the benign complacency and openness which enlivened it; like the brightening rays of the sun, chasing away the gloomy horrors of the winter's reign.

All his features were strong, and expressive of the varying emotions of his proud
F 5 spirit :

spirit: his eyes, notwithstanding the gloom that sometimes lowered about them, were the most beautiful that, as Milton says,

“ Ever shone in the human face divine.”

To have met him at the close of evening in those sequestered shades, amongst which he was particularly fond of rambling, one would almost have been tempted to imagine he was the blooming, yet desponding genius of them.

His retreat the only tenantable spot of a large and ancient monastery, lay at the foot of a hill; which thickly covered with wood, the growth of many ages, hung like a kind of screen over it, as if to exclude the inspection of the curious. A stream of water trickling from the summit, and dashing in its descent against scattered stones, formed a rude melody by no means unpleasing; wildness,

wildness, solitude, and silence, encompassed the ruin; clustering ivy obscured the light of the day; and the croaking of unnumbered birds, unmolested possessors of the mouldering walls, gave additional melancholy to the night.

Mournful trees, the yew, the cypress, and the holly, which shaded the burying-place belonging to the monastery, totally excluded any view of the country. A number of ancient monuments were scattered amongst them; and various little hillocks on the earth denoted the spots where many bones still rested.

A thousand superstitious stories prevailed throughout the Hamlet relative to this place. The rustics avoided it with caution; and, at night, not one would venture near it for the universe.

To a weak imagination, such an abode indeed was dreadful; but on a mind, innocent and properly tutored, it could have no effect.

An old man and woman belonging to the Hamlet attended and prepared for him whatever he required; but, from the reserve with which he treated them, they were unable to gratify their own curiosity, or that of their neighbours.

Had Matilda had an opportunity of accurately surveying the Misanthrope, I doubt not many would exclaim: "No wonder truly she endeavoured to justify the conduct of such a man."

I wish not to render her character an unnatural one, nor shall I pretend to assert her prepossession in his favour would not have been heightened by the elegance of his form and the intelligence of his countenance;

tenance: this, however, I shall affirm, that they would have been incapable of inspiring her with more than transient admiration, if not equalled by elegance of manner, and intelligence of mind.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

“ This pomp of horror
“ Is fit to feed the frenzy in my soul ;
“ Here’s room for meditation ev’n to madness,
“ Till the mind bursts with thinking.”

ROWE’S FAIR PENITENT.

THE relation which Matilda gave of the Misanthrope’s humanity, insensibly interested Mr. Belmore in his favour, and inspired him with a fervent wish to become acquainted with him, and learn his misfortunes, from a hope of being able to mitigate the sorrow they had caused, and recon-

reconcile him by degrees to the world:—this wish he communicated to Matilda. “Surely,” said he, “a mind so susceptible as his cannot long remain inflexible to tenderness and persuasion; and by a proper representation of the life he leads, so repugnant to the laws of society, I trust, he may be restored to a world he seems formed to ornament.

That very evening therefore, Mr. Belmore set off on his charitable visit; desiring Matilda to conceal it, as it would be both troublesome and disagreeable to answer the inquiries which would be made, was it known whither he went.

He passed through the gate, through which the Misanthrope so precipitately retreated the evening he had been addressed by him. With slow and silent steps he proceeded through a dark passage that led
to

to the dwelling and burying-ground, in the latter of which he perceived the Unknown standing by a grave covered with a white stone that appeared to have been lately deposited there.

He softly advanced to him; but his approach was unnoticed. The unhappy young man seemed absorbed in melancholy recollections: suddenly clasping his hands with all the energy of despair, he exclaimed—
“Where now is the boasted leniency of time? Where is the balm it was said to administer to affliction? Alas! common affliction it may heal, but that occasioned by perfidy and ingratitude it has no power over! no, it has been unable to soften my anguish, or lessen my regret for thee! my loved—my buried friend!” He paused, as if overcome by his emotions—the sorrow impressed

impressed on his features, forcibly affected the feelings of Mr. Belmore.

At the name of friend, he remembered his own griefs. He retraced the agonies of the hour in which he wept over the American grave of those dearer and more precious to him than life. A sigh, occasioned by regret and sympathy, heaved his bosom. The Unknown started at this echo of affliction, and turning, he beheld Belmore.

Displeasure and haughtiness instantly overspread his countenance, while astonishment riveted him to the spot.

Mr. Belmore first recovered himself.—
“I fear, Sir,” cried he, “you think this an impertinent intrusion; but I flatter myself you will no longer consider it so, when I assure you it was not curiosity which brought me hither, but solely a wish of endeavouring

deavouring to commence an acquaintance, which, I am confident would be productive of the highest pleasure to me.

“Sir,” replied he, indignantly, “to flattery I have been long a stranger, and ever must abhor it.”

“Our distaste to it,” said Mr. Belmore, “is reciprocal. Believe me, none abhor it more than I do, nor should I be more unwilling to offer, than to listen to it.” But sure, to bestow on merit its portion of deserved praise, cannot be censurable.”

“Good Heaven!” exclaimed, he with the utmost impatience, “am I to be deprived of even the pleasures of solitude—is the retreat to which I have fled from the vices of the world, to be broken in upon by its curiosity and idleness?”

“I am concerned,” cried Mr. Belmore, “that I have thus intruded upon you,
since

since I find my having done so, is so disagreeable to you. I flattered myself that the motive which led me hither, when known, would have rendered my visit not unpleasing; but I now fear I was mistaken in thinking so. I came stimulated by esteem for your virtues, which the humanity of your actions have demonstrated, and pity for the misfortunes to which alone I could attribute your love of solitude. I came to try whether you would permit me to sympathise in your sorrows—whether you were open to conviction; and would attend to the counsel of an old man, who has been deeply experienced in the rugged school of adversity, and from his own knowledge declares that exertions against despair are never unavailing; and that no sorrow—no misfortune can excuse a rational creature in the sight of Heaven, from not endeavouring

to

to fulfil the incumbent duties of life. But my visit is unwelcome, and I bid adieu!"

"Hold, Sir," said he, with an eagerness which evidently proved he was shocked at the idea of offending; "your intentions were very kind, and my rudeness is inexcusable; I solicit your pardon for it."

"Your pardon was granted ere solicited," replied Mr. Belmore, returning: "but let me not misconstrue your words; is it not your wish I should depart?"

He continued silent. "I receive a tacit acknowledgment that it is," said Mr. Belmore, "yet I cannot bring myself to depart. A secret impulse withholds me from doing so. I wish to converse with and try to reconcile you to the society you appear so sedulous to shun."

"I have forsworn the world," cried he: "I am unfit to hold converse with it. Oppressed

pressed with incurable sorrows, wherever I appeared I should spread melancholy around me—my gloom would be infectious, and I should, at once be regarded as the pest of society, and railed against as a cynic.”

“O, no!” said Mr. Belmore, “far different are the emotions you would excite. At your approach sensibility would kindle. Congenial spirits who have known, who have felt the sacredness of grief, would respect and admire you, while attention and delight hung upon your words, as the ebullitions of a feeling heart.”

“Ah! how fallacious are your representations! But even were they true, not the tongues of syrens should allure me from this solitude, where I may revolve my loss, and avoid the vices that occasioned it.”

“I trust your resolution is not unalterable,” cried Mr. Belmore, “and that both
reason

reason and religion will convince you, that murmurings against Heaven are not only unavailing, but almost impious."

"Impious!" repeated he, resentfully. "Do you talk of feeling, and call sorrow impious? No: it is sacred—it is hallowed—it is acceptable to Heaven!"

"How infinitely more acceptable," said Mr. Belmore, "the noble exertions of virtue and of fortitude! They raise, they elevate, they dignify the human character: and angels may look down with pleasure on the magnanimous man repressing despair, conquering the lassitude of affliction, and endeavouring to fulfil the incumbent duties of life."

"Are you not," replied he, "some hard-hearted moralist who, unacquainted with calamity, desires greater exertions than human nature is capable of?"

"No:

“No: you see before you a man, who has borne the burnt of the cruellest adversity. In a foreign land were torn from my bleeding heart two persons, dearer—oh! far dearer to it than existence; in a ground, often deluged by the blood of their countrymen, were they interred. Inexorable duty forced me from the spot, and left their loved ashes to be trampled upon by barbarous, hostile wretches.”

“And you out-lived them?” continued he. “Yes,” interrupted Mr. Belmore, “my exertions were successful, as those in a right cause ever will be; and a power almost supernatural supported and cheered me on my way.”

“Then I am weak indeed,” said he, striking his breast, “for still I sigh with unalleviated anguish. Behold that grave,” pointing to that Mr. Belmore had found him

him at—"that stone covers the mouldering remains of youth, elegance, and valour. Beneath it," continued he, with a broken voice, "lies the poor dust, over which I lament. You know what it is to lose the friend of your soul, such a friend as mine was: so interwoven with every hope of felicity, that"—

His utterance was now quite stifled: each feature, from an attempted suppression of his emotions, was swelled. "Will you," said Mr. Belmore, "allow me to return here to-morrow evening? He shook his head. "I witness and I revere your grief," said Mr. Belmore; "and far be it from me to intrude on its sacred privileges. Farewell; I shall see you again."

He then left him; yet he had not gone many steps ere he stopped—he looked back. The unfortunate young man still continued

continued immovable: his eyes were rivetted on the grave; his hands were folded in each other. "Merciful Powers!" cried the compassionate old man, "look down with pity on this youth; breathe peace and resignation into his troubled mind, and save him from the hand of incurable despair!"

As he approached the cottage, Matilda flew to meet him, all anxiety to hear the particulars of his interview with the Misanthrope. "Alas!" said she, after listening attentively to his account of it, "affliction is then, as we imagined, the cause of his retirement."

"His resolution is not, I believe," continued Mr. Belmore, "very obstinate; and I am in hopes gentle arguments may at length, prevail upon him to forsake the gloomy solitude in which he is now buried."

Early the next evening, Mr. Belmore and Matilda left the cottage, but on different routes: the former again went to the Recluse, and the latter to drink tea with Patty Hillgrove.

After tea they rambled out. They were fauntering through a meadow, when Patty exclaimed, "Lord! yonder is Mr. Bromley!" and Matilda, directing her eyes to where she pointed, saw a gentleman indolently reclined under a tree, with a book in his hand.

"Oh! let us go to him," said Patty; you will be enchanted with him;" and, without waiting for an answer, she ran forward. "How do you, Mr. Bromley?" cried she. "Ah! my dear little Patty," said he, half rising, "how have I existed these twenty ages without seeing you?"—"What are you reading?" said she, stooping
ing

ing to the book.—“ Oh! Arcadia modernized; of Corydon and Phillis; Daphne and Thyrsis. Come hither,” continued he, pulling her to him, “ you shall be my Sylvia.” At that moment he glanced towards Matilda—he looked from her to Patty—he quitted his hold; and, after surveying her with the most scrutinizing inspection, in a whisper, but loud enough however to be heard, asked Patty who that angel was she had with her?

Matilda, indeed, looked particularly beautiful: exercise had given additional bloom and animation to her countenance.

“ Upon my honour,” said he, rising and approaching her, “ I think you extremely handsome; and must entreat permission to introduce myself to you.” So saying, he attempted to salute her; but Matilda, offended by the freedom of his words and actions, started back.

“No, Sir,” exclaimed she, “not in this manner.” Patty whispered something to him, and with a mortified air, he remained silent some minutes; then recovering from his embarrassment, he addressed her with more respect.—“You must excuse me, upon my honour, my dear Madam (said he), you must excuse the actions of a man, whose senses were quite bewildered with the sight of unexpected beauty; besides, in the country we have no idea of rigid ceremony—we are all shepherds and shepherdesses, rural brothers and sisters, and take it for granted we may lay aside the etiquette of formal introduction.”

Matilda, who equally disliked the affectation of disdain or prudery, gave a smile to his apology; and he insisted on permission to attend them in their ramble: a permission which Patty eagerly, and Matilda tacitly, granted.

“Good

“ Good Heaven!” said he, addressing himself to Matilda, “ what cruel destiny prevented me from sooner learning you were in my neighbourhood: but how do you exist in this place?—how breathe?”

“ Extremely well, indeed,” replied Matilda; “ the place is very pleasant, and the country always delightful to me.”

“ Oh! certainly said he, “ purling rills, shady groves, inexhaustible sources of delight; Heavens! there is no existing from them!”

“ Lord bless me!” cried Patty, “ Mr. Bromley, sure it is not long ago since you said you hated the country.”—“ Oh! my dear,” he replied, “ my taste was then depraved; I had caught the infection of the metropolis; but now—yes now, my faculties are enlightened; in such society as the present a desert would appear a paradise. Me-

thinks I consider myself now as Corydon, you Sylvia, this Daphne; we wander, enchanted with each other, from hill to dale; echo responsive to our accents; the birds carol over our heads; flowers almost spontaneous greet us in vernal beauty; and every tree records our names."

Matilda laughed at this speech; it was pronounced with a countenance, indeed, which did not denote much seriousness.

"You laugh," said he, still looking at Matilda, "as if you believed me jesting; but really I am serious, when I say I adore a country life; and could I get a dear charmer to take me, and tame me, I would become a mere domestic animal, and she might treat me like a pet sparrow."

They now arrived at Mr. Hillgrove's. Patty, with a voice of chagrin said, she durst not stay out any longer. Mr. Bromley
assured

assured her he was inconsolable at being so soon deprived of her company; yet declared he would sooner suffer uneasiness himself, than permit her to feel any; looked at his watch, said it was late; told her he imagined he heard her father's voice inquiring for her, and insisted on attending Matilda home.

She assured him there was no necessity for his attendance; "for you know," said she, "as we are all rural brothers and sisters, there can be no possible danger." He would not, however, be prevented from accompanying her to the cottage.

"I, my dear angel!" exclaimed he, "have been dying these ten hours to get rid of that girl. She is quite intolerable. Upon my soul I wish her father would send her to sale with his poultry next market-day."

Had Mr. Bromley been acquainted with the disposition of Matilda—had he known how perfectly divested of envy she was—how incapable of feeling pleasure from hearing another person depreciated, he would have been more cautious in uttering his opinion of Patty, which Matilda heard with a look of disapprobation. His speech, if I may use the expression, was indeed intended as a kind of bait to draw forth her sentiments, and of course give him some insight into her character.

He endeavoured to palliate what he had said concerning Patty, in consequence of finding it displeasing to her. Patty (he said) was undoubtedly a good sort of girl; and what he had said of her was absolutely extorted from him by an unavoidable comparison between her and her companion.

He

He started a thousand topics; he argued to support his opinions; but his arguments were weakly supported; and to a person more experienced than Matilda, it must have been obvious they were only started from a wish of having them confuted, that thus by appearing to yield to her superior judgment, he might pay an indirect compliment to her understanding, and, he hoped, insinuate himself into her favour.

They at length stopped at the cottage. Matilda wished him a good evening; yet he did not attempt to depart; he loitered about. "What a charming retreat!" cried he, "fit for a sylvan deity!"

"Do not you find yourself fatigued," continued he; "I am monstrously tired, only with the walk I mean." Matilda would not appear to understand those hints; and, again curtsying, was going into the
house,

house. "Well, now, upon my honour," said he, "I did not think you would be so cruel: you are downright barbarous not to ask me to rest myself, after what I have said."

Matilda still pretended not to understand him, and again wishing him a good evening, she slightly bowed, and, entering the cottage, closed the door.

"What a little prude!" exclaimed Mr. Bromley to himself (as he sprung over the hedge, not with the appearance of a man sinking beneath fatigue); "one would think her mother was a Methodist, and that with her milk she had imbibed her sanctified scruples."

The coldness of Matilda, though it mortified the vanity, could not depress the hopes of Bromley. He entertained too high an opinion of himself to doubt his
being

being able, in a very short time, to overcome her reserve, and make a conquest of her heart—a conquest which he meditated almost the moment he beheld her: for never had he before seen a form and face so truly captivating—never had he before seen such elegant simplicity—such bewitching beauty united; and he resolved to leave nothing undone which could enable him to crop this fair rose, and “rifle all its sweetness.” From her situation, with which Patty acquainted him, he could not flatter himself that this would be a very easy matter, as she dwelt much upon the vigilance of Mr. Belmore.

Difficulties, however, though numerous as the hydra’s heads, were disregarded by him, when he had any scheme in view which could gratify his inclinations.

Brought up in the fashionable world, both his education and pursuits had been inimical to virtue; and the large fortune which he possessed, had from the time he became master of it, which was at a very early period, been rendered subservient to the purposes of vice.

His person was not inelegant, nor was his countenance disagreeable, though too bold to captivate delicacy; his manners were easy; his address insinuating; and by the neighbouring girls he was considered as superior to the common race of beings. At his approach respect and admiration sat on every face; the adulation with which they treated him was highly flattering to his vanity: the slightest notice from him was esteemed an honour; and even the liberties he thought himself authorised to take, were regarded

regarded as distinctions too delectable to be avoided.

Some intricate affairs in the country, obliged him reluctantly to quit the metropolis for some months, in order to have them regulated. He invited a few of his fashionable associates to follow to his seat; but they disappointed him; and how to kill time was his whole study: for this purpose he romped with the girls, ridiculed their male relatives, whom he considered as only fit for the wilds of America, and pursued with avidity, all the amusements the country afforded. Books he had never relished; and if dreadful necessity sometimes obliged him to have recourse to them, those he perused were either too trifling or immoral for improvement.

Full of the idea of Matilda, and the designs he meditated on her, he returned home, after parting from her.

His

His valet-de-chambre was waiting in his apartment for him; and, perceiving unusual emotions pictured in his countenance, said, "Vat be de matter now?"

"Le Rogne! oh, Le Rogne!" cried he, "I have seen an angel." "Ma foi! you do find de angel every day!"

"But not such a one as this, Le Rogne—Oh! could I win her affections, I should be happier than the Grand Sultan," "Me hope you may," replied Le Rogne, with a shrug.

This valet acted in the double capacity of servant and confidant to his master, who now related his interview with Matilda, and they mutually concerted a thousand schemes about her.

Le Rogne then retired to pay his *devoirs* to the fille-de-chambre of a neighbouring woman of quality; and his master sauntered about

about the room, not really knowing what to do with himself, whistling indeed, like Cymon, for want of thought; and often wishing for the dear charmer, who, like Iphigene, could at once have roused him from the stupidity of indolence. He at last, fortunately, found a treatise on the nature of rarefied air, and though not absolutely determined on making a balloon, he thought this better than nothing.

He was a striking evidence of the languor and heaviness to which those are liable who neglect cultivating their minds. Amusement will pall—dissipation will tire; but the pleasures which an improved understanding yields are ever new—ever delightful—such as have power to mitigate calamity, harmonise the soul, and make time glide away with the serenity of complacency and self-approbation.

CHAP:

CHAP. XII.

“ Henceforth not name a woman ;
“ ’Tis treason to my ear. They are
“ The bane of empires, and the rot of power ;
“ The cause of all our mischiefs, murders, massacres.”

LEE.

IT is now time to describe the second meeting between Mr. Belmore and the Misanthrope.

The worthy, the benevolent Belmore hastened to his gloomy retreat. On passing through the arch he perceived him at a distance,

distance, melancholy as ever; yet with his eyes directed towards the gate, as if expecting his approach.

He made a slight motion of his head as Belmore approached, and for some moments they remained silent.

Mr. Belmore, first speaking, said, "I know not whether my visits are acceptable; but believe me when I say I feel so interested about you, that without the utmost pain I could not keep myself away."

A slight bow was the only answer he received.

The Misanthrope appeared half gratified by the attention of Mr. Belmore; yet, from an habitual fullness, unwilling to disclose the pleasure it gave him.

A mossy turf was beside them; he pointed to it; and, seating himself, Mr. Belmore followed his example.

"Satisfy

"Satisfy me so far at least," continued Mr. Belmore, "as to inform me whether you really do or do not imagine me an intruder?"

"I know not what," replied he, "to think. Credulity and suspicion I am equally averse to; and yet in such a world, how much reason is there to repent of the one—to rejoice at the other."

"Constant credulity is certainly indicative of weakness," replied Mr. Belmore; "yet a weakness more excusable than the injustice, the cruelty, that is manifested by the other; of me, I hope you have nothing to suspect. I cannot say, indeed, my regard is quite disinterested; for, if my arguments are sufficiently powerful to overcome your present gloom, I trust not only to restore to the community an individual, whose example will excite emulation, whose virtues will

will ennoble and rejoice it, but to gain for myself an amiable friend."

"But have I not already told you, I had forsworn the world," cried he, "in consequence of severe misfortunes!"

"Yes," said Belmore, "you informed me you had forsworn it; but it was in a fit of desperation!—Desperation is madness; and the vows of madmen, you know, are ever disregarded."

"Oh! it was the madness," exclaimed he, "of grief—of anguish—of despair!—it was a phrenzy in which I almost cursed the whole species—in which I implored the termination of existence—in which I hung trembling with anguish over the remains of all I adored."

"Alas!" cried Belmore, "I told you, I experienced similar distress; but life, though

though robbed of its blessings, yet retained its claims upon me. The knowledge of having exerted myself to the utmost of my ability, has at length diffused a tranquillity through my bosom, which inspires me with the secret hope of having found favour in the sight of that Being, without whose permission no care could ever interrupt the pleasures of life."

"But," said the young man with earnestness, "society has no claim upon me; I am unconnected—I am alone. My exertions could little benefit the world—my retirement never hurt it."

"Believe me," replied Mr. Belmore, "however unconnected, however unknown, society has still a claim upon you. Was every one, who labours under sorrow, to act as you have done, we should soon find the incumbent duties of life left unfulfilled, to
the

the utter destruction of its harmony and happiness."

" Yet, allowing society has no claim upon you, as a single, unconnected individual, could you bear to drawl out a tedious existence, in this useless, this inactive state? Young as you are, how many, many years, have you yet, in all probability to live. If those years are devoted to solitude, there is no doubt, that from the indolence of your life, you will either sink into a lethargic state, or grow so discontented for want of that variety which is natural for us all to love, and scarcely possible for us to do without, that life, by degrees will become a burthen to you, and your asperity consequently increase, till it renders you less than human, and creates a kind of abhorrence; for a being thus perverting every faculty, and leading a life more worthless than

than the reptile that crawls beneath his feet."

"Abhorrence," said he, passion kindling in his eyes, and rising from his seat, "is this your tenderness? these your arguments to restore me to myself—to the world? No, to make me hate it, and its species, more than ever! Is sensibility to be abhorred? Are the wounds of misfortune to be probed by insult?" Here Mr. Belmore also rising interrupted him. "Tell me, ere you proceed," said he, "to what you object?" He looked at him with the utmost disdain, and continued silent.

"I urge you," repeated Belmore, "to speak; if not, I assert my words are just: do you be also just, and candidly confess they are only unpleasing, because convincing."

The

The Misanthrope walked about: he reflected. Every word recurred with pointed force, and engraved conviction on his heart.

He stopped—his fury was no more; and the flush of indignation forsook his cheeks.

“But gentler language,” said he.—
“Hold,” cried Mr. Belmore; “if I beheld a man unknowing to himself about taking a draught of poison, should I only gently attempt to draw it from him; should I not at once dash it from his hand?”

Then with greater softness approaching him, and taking his hand, “I know not by what name to address you,” said he, “but there is one by which I wish to call you. Will you permit me to address you by the appellation of friend? Will you accept my
proffers

proffers of esteem and regard; nor term me an intruder or insulter?"

The susceptible young man betrayed emotions he wished to conceal: the muscles of his face were working; his hand trembled in that of Belmore's.

"A veteran in life, in affliction have I been indeed," said Mr. Belmore; "you are young in one, in the other you say you are old."

"Say!" cried he, starting: "O Heavens! it was the friend of my soul I lost. He was young and lovely, when a broken heart sent him to his grave. 'Tis the idea of that, of the sorrows which oppressed him, that has rendered my anguish on his account, so acute.

"Had you known him, the ardour of our friendship, the gentle probity of his spirit, the benevolence of his disposition, the

the readiness with which he extended relief to the children of affliction, you would not wonder at that anguish; nor my resolution to seclude myself from a world, in which his peace and happiness were wrecked."

"No," cried Belmore, "I should not wonder at it, if you thought by such a measure you could regain your lost tranquillity?"

"Regain it!" said he, starting; "Oh, no!—'tis gone for ever!"—He turned pale, and threw himself trembling and agitated upon a seat. Belmore sat down beside him, and by the sympathy he manifested, at length, in some degree, conquered the obstinacy of this unfortunate, and induced him to enter into conversation.

They continued to converse, too much interested by the subject to mark the gradual approaches of night; the gloomy shadows

dows of which, rendered more awful the surrounding scene, where scattered ruins and mouldering tomb-stones were on every side exhibited, striking mementos of the quick progress and devastation of time.

But though they had not heeded the increasing darkness, they could not behold the rising moon dispersing that darkness and checquering the prospect with the silver of her beams, without expressing the most enthusiastic admiration. All, indeed, was calculated to delight and calm the soul! not a breeze was heard to blow; and the discordant birds, the solitary tenants of the ruin, were hushed to silence.

Mr. Belmore, ere long, resumed the subject on which they had been conversing. In the course of his conversation he spoke of the shortness of existence, as a further
reason

reason for preventing us from wasting any of our time in inactivity.

"Soon," cried he, "are we called from this world, to the tribunal of our Creator, a Sovereign Judge; where most assuredly we shall be punished or rewarded, according to the use we have made of the talents committed to our charge.

Soothed by his tenderness, the (he should not now be called Misanthrope, but at present his name is unrevealed) appeared attentive to his arguments; and, by not attempting to refute them, tacitly acknowledged their justness. A kind of promise was extorted from him, that he would emerge from his retreat, visit Mr. Belmore, and soon think of some profession, which by engrossing his attention, and employing his mind, would prevent him from again sinking into enervating sadness.

The army was thought of;—"A profession to which I confess myself partial," said Mr. Belmore, "as I think it calculated to strengthen all the energies of the mind, and give a general knowledge of the world."

The young man replied, he was accustomed to a military life, and had not long retired from the army.

"Then I dare say," said Mr. Belmore, "you will have no objection to return to it; particularly if the rumour which at present prevails, of the kingdom being on the eve of a war, should be confirmed; a rumour which perhaps you have heard of." "I have," returned he, "and heard it with regret."

"Good Heaven!" continued he, with emphatic warmth, "must dissensions, heaped on dissensions, for ever rend this globe?—must ambition still continue to tor-

ture

ture and destroy mankind? Can its triumphs compensate for the wretchedness it occasions—can they dry the tears of those whom it has rendered fatherless, or assuage the anguish of the widow and the parent, despoiled by its means of their best hope?”

“ ’Tis not always ambition which leads to hostilities,” cried Mr. Belmore. “ Aggression much oftener provokes them; and though it is grievous to reflect upon the miseries caused by war, yet if the sufferings of a few can promote the general good, surely our reason must prevent us from murmuring at them. But, if you please, we will pursue this subject no further.

“ There was a little tincture of gloominess,” continued he, smiling, “ in what you said; but I trust it will soon be entirely eradicated from your temper, by a reconciliation

ciliation to the world, the society of intelligent men, and amiable women."

"Women!" cried he, starting with a look of rage and horror: "O! name them not; they carry destruction along with them; they are plagues—they are pests—they are the bane of life!"

Mr. Belmore's tongue was tied by astonishment, and he still went on with vehemence.

"You have undone all you have been doing, by mentioning them. My beloved Edward—my lost friend was the victim of female artifice and perfidy!"

"And for the perfidy of one woman," said Mr. Belmore, "are you to stigmatise the whole sex?"

"Yes," answered he, "the same deceit, the same artifice, the same guile, however concealed, still lurks in every female bosom.

som. Oh! you know not what I have lost by the faithlessness of one; you know not the misery it has entailed upon me: 'tis not alone my friend I have lost, my—— But I will not dwell upon my irreparable injuries; I will only say I have sworn everlasting hatred to the false perfidious syrens.

“Your arguments have now lost their efficacy; discontent returns to my bosom; the gloomy horrors of misanthropy alone suit me; and never will I cease to rail against the curse of the creation—woman.”

Belmore, the friend of Lucinda, the protector of Matilda, could not tamely hear their sex defamed.

“Young man,” said he, with some indignation, “this language ill becomes you. Reflect, that in arraigning the sex, you also arraign the Being who gave you birth; and

if not lost to every feeling of filial respect and tenderness, suppress your calumny."

Mr. Belmore uttered these words in a tone of solemn severity, which seemed to affect him. He rose abruptly, appeared much agitated, and walked backward and forward some minutes in silence; then suddenly stopping before Mr. Belmore—"Excuse me," said he, "I will in future learn the hypocrisy of mankind, and conceal my real sentiments."

"Soon, I trust," replied Mr. Belmore, "to hear you talking differently—to find candour succeeding acrimony—and content chasing away spleen and melancholy; while common justice must compel you to acknowledge the female sex the sweeteners of existence."

"Never!" he pronounced with energy. But Mr. Belmore would not oppose him

too far at present; he dreaded, by further arguments at this period, to exasperate him to obstinacy, and render the idea of a further intimacy between them detested. He hoped by moderation and sympathy to win his esteem, gain his confidence, and hear a circumstantial detail of those occurrences which had deprived him of his friend, and corroded his peace.

It was not from idle curiosity he desired to hear his misfortunes, but a hope that, by knowing them, he might be better qualified to offer such consolation as would erase despair and misanthropy.

With fresh protestations of esteem, an esteem which Mr. Belmore really felt for him, they separated; Mr. Belmore having first learned that the name of his new friend was Charles Howard.

Mr. Belmore was highly pleased with the progress he appeared already to have made with him, and rejoiced to think he had not suffered any difficulties to discourage him in the benevolent cause he had undertaken. He saw he had yet a little perverseness to combat against; but, permitted to visit, to converse with him, as he now was, he trusted, gradually to overcome it, and be the happy instrument of restoring to the world a man who, as far as he could judge from so slight an acquaintance, seemed formed to adorn it.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

“ As softest metals are not slow to melt,

“ So pity soonest runs in gentle minds.”

DRYDEN.

MR. Belmore found Matilda anxiously watching for his return upon the lawn; she was beginning, indeed, to feel extremely uneasy at his long stay; and had he been much longer absent, would have sent a messenger after him. The cloth was already laid for supper, to which they immediately

sat down, and Mr. Belmore began to answer the various inquiries of Matilda, having first gratefully thanked her for the solicitude she manifested about him.

The countenance of Matilda, even more than her language, expressed her sensibility for the sorrows of this unhappy favourite: a sensibility, however, more pleasing than painful, since it was intermixed with a hope of seeing him in a short time receiving the benefit that was intended by the visits of Mr. Belmore.

But the pleasure derived from this hope was damped by a secret regret, when, as Mr. Belmore proceeded in his relation of the conversation that had passed between them, he mentioned the prejudiced opinion he entertained of her sex. A thousand benevolent projects instantly dropped to the ground, and she felt disappointed beyond

beyond expression, at being compelled to relinquish the idea of aiding the benevolent efforts of Mr. Belmore, and contributing not only to soften the anguish of this Unfortunate, but reconcile him to the world.

She knew not that the disappointment she felt was impressed upon her features, till Mr. Belmore, with a smile, said, "Come, come, my dear Matilda, do not despair; if bent on conquering this gloomy being, I will yet give you hopes."

Matilda blushed; and the soft confusion which overspread her countenance was not diminished by Mr. Belmore's proceeding to say—"I shall, indeed, pronounce him a stranger to candour and sensibility, if he can know you without losing his prejudice against your sex."

"But too much cannot be accomplished at once. I have already brought him, in
some

some degree, to reason. I have half prevailed upon him to forsake a retirement so unbecoming his youth, and think of a profession suiting his time of life and disposition. Soon I hope to eradicate all remains of spleen and discontent from his mind; then will I introduce him to my Matilda, who, as I have already said, will, I have no doubt, dispel all his unjust prejudices, and compel him to again acknowledge the existence of female excellence."

"You behold your Matilda with partial eyes, my dear Sir," replied she. "It would be presumption in her to entertain a hope of being able to conquer prejudices which your arguments failed of overcoming."

"Well, well," cried Mr. Belmore, smiling, "we will not argue the point at present;—tell me how you passed the evening?"

Matilda

Matilda informed him. She mentioned her accidental meeting with, and introduction to Mr. Bromley, and also the opinion his light and frivolous behaviour had given rise to.

“But it would be uncandid,” continued she, “to say it was a just opinion; he may appear to greater advantage, when better known: if his, however, are the manners adopted by the fashionable world, may I never become an inhabitant of it!”

“May you never!” cried Mr. Belmore, taking her hand, and affectionately pressing it between his—“may you never lose that innocence and simplicity of heart which will preserve you from the contagion of folly and vice, by making you shrink from an intercourse with either, and permit you only to relish such pleasures as leave no sting behind!—May you ever, in mind

as

as in person, resemble your mother!—more perfect, more lovely, I could not wish you.” He paused, and his varying cheek proclaimed the emotions of his soul.

“Such as I have ever beheld you,” he continued, again raising his eyes to Matilda, who was not less affected than he was—“such may I continue to behold you! and oh! ere I am called from this world, to be translated, I humbly hope, to lasting happiness; may I have the felicity of seeing you united to a being who, from justly appreciating your merit, will give me the sweet assurance of being a tender guardian of your peace!”

Matilda could not speak; love, gratitude, and sensibility, swelled her heart, almost to bursting; and as she kissed the hand of Belmore, her warm tears fell upon it, and spoke those feelings to which she
could

could not give utterance. They soon recovered from their emotions, and, after conversing a little longer together, retired to that tranquil repose which is generally the attendant on virtue and content.

They arose soon after "the herald of the morning" had, singing up to "Heaven's high gate," proclaimed its approach, to enjoy the sweets of early day.

The summer was now far advanced; and soon after breakfast Mr. Belmore quitted Matilda, for the purpose of seeing how his hay-makers went on.

Matilda, after making the necessary domestic arrangements, took up her work, and repaired to the mossy bank in the garden, where, sheltered by the thick foliage of the trees that grew over it, she could enjoy the refreshing breeze that fluttered round, without suffering any inconvenience from
the

the sun. As she worked, she involuntarily joined in the woodland concert, a concert neither interrupted nor injured by the humming of the bees, the lowing of the cattle, nor the gurgling of water. She was singing a little pathetic air, when a sudden interruption was given to her harmony, by the unexpected appearance of Bromley.

That gentleman's whole mind was occupied by her idea; even in his sleep her image was before him, and in the morning his conversation entirely turned upon her. To become intimate at her dwelling, he felt absolutely essential to his happiness; but previous to his attempting this, he wished to learn something of her character and situation; and also those of Mr. Belmore, of whose residence in his neighbourhood he was ignorant till the preceding evening. To try and obtain for
him

him the information he required, Le Rogne, his confidant upon every occasion, was dispatched while he was at breakfast. He returned in the course of an hour with all the information he had been able to collect from the landlord of the village inn—information highly favourable to Matilda and her protector, and which convinced Bromley he must be circumspect in his actions, and veil the designs he meditated against her, till he had created some interest for himself in her heart, which he flattered himself would be no very difficult matter, as he now knew how to regulate his motions. The moment breakfast was over, he prepared to visit Matilda.

In his way to the cottage he met Belmore and Hillgrove walking to a distant field. An idea that the former was the protector of Matilda, induced him to stop and accost
Hillgrove,

Hillgrove, of whom, in a whisper, he inquired the name of his companion.

On learning it, he directly introduced himself to Mr. Belmore with all that ease which his natural assurance and intercourse with fashionable life had given him; expressed his happiness at having such a neighbour, and said he was going to pay his compliments to him at the moment they met.

Mr. Belmore would have returned with him to the cottage; but he peremptorily declined such a proof of his politeness, and bidding him a hasty adieu, without letting him know whither he was going, he hastened forward, delighted at the idea of a *tête-à-tête* with Matilda.

As soon as they parted, Mr. Belmore inquired from Hillgrove, concerning him. Luckily for Bromley, Hillgrove, who had no notion of ever telling a falsehood, either to
serve

serve himself or any one else, knew nothing bad of him; and though, from the account he gave of him, Mr. Belmore was not led to think him a very estimable character, he by no means thought him one that need be shunned.

Almost breathless with the haste he had made, Bromley reached the cottage; and being told by the maid where he would find Matilda, he stole to the recess through a winding walk, inclosed between high hedges of hazle, and surprised its fair inmate, as we have already mentioned.

"Where am I?" he cried, with affected rapture, and gazing round him with looks which well accorded with his words:

"Surely Paradise is round me,

"And ev'ry sense is full of thy perfection."

"To hear thee speak might calm a madman's phrenzy;

"But, to behold the beauties of those eyes, might—"

Here

Here Matilda, who by this time had recovered from the confusion into which his unexpected appearance had thrown her, interrupted his rhapsody, by rising. She collected her working materials, and seemed on the point of returning to the house; which he perceiving, apologized with much humility, for having intruded on her, and intreated her so earnestly to resume her seat, that, unwilling to appear affected or disdainful, she at last consented to do so.

“Why,” cried he, sitting down by her, “you are quite a Lady Notable, I think. Do you know,” added he, “I am a very good judge of work?” pretending to examine hers, which was a muslin handkerchief, worked in coloured silks—“especially,” fixing his eyes on her face, “of the works of nature. I can see where the tints are pure, where the colours are blended with judicious

judicious elegance; as for instance, now, I will show you"—taking from his pocket a little round case, which opening, he presented to her. Matilda, expecting to see a beautiful picture, raised her eyes; but as instantly averted them, on finding it a glass in which her own innocent countenance was reflected. "Well," said he, "I am sure you must allow me judgment, when I declare this picture which I have shewn you to be one of the most perfect works of nature." "Certainly," cried Matilda, smiling, "I should wrong my own judgment, if I did not coincide with you in thinking so."

"But seriously," said he, "how few, gifted as you are, would think of passing their hours beneath the "shade of melancholy boughs! thus concealing charms from the world, which, but to be seen, would insure you general admiration."—

"Well,"

"Well," replied Matilda, "allowing I had pretensions to such admiration, if convinced it would not add to my happiness, should I not be foolish in seeking it?"

"Undoubtedly," said he : "indeed I have ever thought, to a woman of sensibility, the homage of one sincere heart, infinitely preferable to the adulation of the multitude." These words were accompanied with a look which Matilda thought rather too expressive of sentiments she did not wish to encourage ; and rising, she returned to the house, where, after a little entreaty, she sat down to the piano, and played and sung for him. Every moment, he grew more fascinated with her, and his dark, deceitful heart was entirely occupied by plans to get her into his power.

He lingered in the cottage, till Belmore's return, to whom, in order to prevent any
sus-

suspicion arising in his mind, he declared his visit had been an unpremeditated one. Belmore credited this assertion, and invited him to spend the evening at the cottage; an invitation he accepted with pleasure.

Matilda began to entertain a more favourable opinion of him than she had done at first; and Mr. Belmore joined with her in thinking he was a good-natured, inoffensive character, whose chief error was in yielding to too great a flow of spirits.

CHAP. XIV.

“ Severe decrees may keep our tongues in awe ;
“ But, to our thoughts, what edict can give law ?
“ Ev’n you yourself to your own breaff shall tell
“ Your crimes, and your own conscience be your hell.”

DRYDEN’S AURENGZEBE.

MATILDA sent to request the company of Miss Patty Hillgrove to tea, who joyfully accepted her invitation.

She and Bromley arrived about the same time at the cottage. This simple girl considered him a paragon of elegance, and
was

was weak enough to imagine he had admired her; an admiration which she indeed repaid threefold. Deluded by this idea, she actually disobliged her father, by discarding an humble suitor, in hopes of obtaining this affluent, yet far more undeserving one.

The delight she experienced at so unexpectedly meeting Mr. Bromley, sparkled in her eyes and glowed upon her cheeks; a delight, however, in which he by no means participated. But this he took care should not be discovered, and appeared so easy, so unaffected, and so good-humoured, that Mr. Belmore began to like him, and Matilda to think still better of him.

Patty was unusually talkative; her little nothings were delivered with the utmost volubility.

"Ha, Mr. Bromley," said she, "do you know, we are going to have a wedding?"

Old Miss Wilton, who you said put you in mind of an Egyptian mummy, is going to be married to Mr. Gagely, who you always declared looked like a shaking Mandarin. I am to be bride-maid, and so is Bessy Wilcox; and we expect very great diversion, I assure you. 'Tis the most ridiculous thing on earth for a person at her time of life to think of marrying."

"Well, really, Miss Patty," replied Bromley, with pretended gravity, "I can't agree with you in thinking so. From her age, she will no doubt reflect seriously upon the important duties she is about entering on, and consequently make a very estimable wife. When there is no disparity in years, I cannot see any thing ridiculous in people marrying at any period of life; but I lose all patience when I behold an
Hebe

Hebe united to a Lord Chalkstone, or an Adonis to a Hecate."

"Certainly (said Mr. Belmore, to whom the latter part of his speech was addressed) with reason, since such unions are generally productive of misery, interest being almost ever the inducement to them."

"But," said Matilda, "is it not possible a sensible woman, though advanced in years, may captivate a sensible man; and that an old man, with the same attractions, may win the affections of a young woman? History presents us with several instances of the kind. The celebrated Maintenon, when past the meridian of her charms, conquered and retained during life the heart of Louis the Fourteenth; and the young and beautiful Portia wedded herself to the aged and infirm Seneca."

"Well, really," exclaimed Patty, interrupting her, "I wonder at that; for I am sure, of all things, I could never bring myself to marry an old man."

"Yet notwithstanding those instances," said Bromley, "I fear the charms of maturity will never be so much admired as those of blooming youth; except indeed we have a race of Ninons, who, like that extraordinary woman, shall kill at fourscore, and be styled the grandmother of the graces."

After tea, a walk was proposed, and they set out just as the sun was beginning to decline; and,

"Every shepherd told his tale,
:: Under the hawthorn in the dale."

After rambling a good way, they came to a small neat house, which, together with

the

the grounds that surrounded it, attracted their attention and admiration. It stood in a beautiful garden, and was backed by a hanging wood, which admitted a view of the village church, some scattered cottages, and an extensive tract of richly-cultivated land.

This, Patty informed them, was the Parsonage; and in the garden, which was only divided from the road by a low hedge of hawthorn, they saw its reverend owner walking. He was an elderly man, with a sweetness and sensibility in his countenance, which could not fail of interesting all who possessed sensibility themselves, in his favour,

This was the first time Belmore and Matilda had seen him; an indisposition, from which he was but just recovering, having prevented him from officiating at

church since they had come to this part of the country, They had long wished for an opportunity of becoming acquainted with him; and Mr. Belmore determined, if possible, to avail himself of the present.

With this intention he lingered near the garden, as if for the purpose of admiring the surrounding prospect. While he leaned against the hedge that inclosed it, a little spaniel suddenly crept out, and began leaping about Bromley and licking his hands, with such marks of vehement affection, as attracted his notice from Matilda, to whom he was speaking.

Had a monster of the most hideous kind been presented to his view, he could not have manifested greater horror than he did at this moment; he started—he coloured—he actually trembled with agitation; and the dog still continuing its caresses, he
kicked

kicked it from him with a violence that made it yelp violently.

His companions looked with astonishment at his behaviour; Matilda patted the dog; Patty stared; and Mr. Belmore inquired whether he was unwell?

This was an excellent hint, and immediately seized by him. He said he was taken with a giddiness, which he supposed proceeded from fatigue, as he had walked a great deal in the heat of the day: then somewhat recovering his composure, he patted the dog, and said, laughing, "He must return the notice of a creature; who shewed so great a predilection for him."

The animal, severely hurt, still continued its whining; which reaching the ears of Mr. Ashmore, the parson, who had hitherto been too deeply absorbed in what appeared a melancholy meditation, to notice the

party, he hastily approached the spot, and taking the dog in his arms, caressed it with the utmost tenderness.

Patty accosted him familiarly. After a little conversation with her, his eyes were directed from her to her companions; and a general introduction taking place, he invited them to walk in and rest themselves, an invitation which all unhesitatingly accepted but Bromley: he retired precipitately, under the pretence of indisposition, to the great mortification of Miss Patty.

Ashmore conducted his guests to a flower-woven arbour in his garden, where cyder and cakes were brought to them; and they sat agreeably conversing, till the evening was far advanced. On parting, he promised soon to call upon them, and, in return, received a promise from them, that they
would

would often favour him with their company.

Though Matilda did not doubt Bromley's assertion of illness, she could not forgive his conduct to the dog, nor by any means join in the warm encomiums Patty bestowed upon him.

Had she or Mr. Belmore been prone to suspicion, they would certainly have given way to it, in consequence of the sudden discomposure of his looks: as this was not the case, however, they believed it owing to the cause he assigned for it.

CHAP. XV.

“ Before the curing of a strong disease,
“ Even in the instant of repair and health,
“ The fit is strongest : Evils that take leave,
“ On their departure most of all shew evil.”

SHAKESPEARE'S KING JOHN.

MR. Ashmore did not long defer his promised visit. A further conversation with him augmented Mr. Belmore's predilection for him; a predilection he felt pleased to think was mutual. He was delighted at the prospect he now beheld of
having

having an agreeable society, as he had often feared the winter, different as it must be from the winters she had passed at Woodford, where they were surrounded by several elegant and agreeable families, would prove rather tedious to Matilda. This fear, however, was in a great measure removed by the acquaintance he had formed with Ashmore, whose conversation was sensible and highly entertaining, and also with Bromley, who had sufficient talents to render himself an amusing companion, and who had mentioned his intention of continuing in the country the whole year.

But no new acquaintance, or expectation of pleasing, could render him forgetful of the afflicted Howard; his idea was never banished; and to restore him to the world, still one of the most sanguine wishes of Mr. Belmore's heart. He visited him repeatedly,
and

and appeared gradually to gain his esteem, and divest him of his prejudices. His tenderness—his sympathy indeed, were too consolatory to be disregarded: they were like balm of the most precious kind to his lacerated bosom.

But though Mr. Belmore gained upon his esteem, he did not win his confidence; the nature of that perfidy and those vices, which had occasioned the misfortunes he deplored, was most carefully concealed; but reserved as he was, Mr. Belmore had some reason to suspect his sorrows were not caused entirely by the untimely death of his friend. Anxious, however, as he was to develop the mystery in which he was wrapt, he dropt no hint of that anxiety; his feelings revolting from the idea of a solicited confidence.

Belmore

Belmore at length proposed his coming to visit him. At this proposal he started, and betrayed the utmost repugnance, intermingled with something like displeasure at Mr. Belmore's supposing him of so unsteady a disposition as to give up the resolution he had formed of not again mixing in society. His agitated feelings were again soothed, however, by Mr. Belmore, and he forced himself to confess the obligations he thought he lay under to him for his unremitted attentions.

“Your friendship,” cried he, “merits my warmest acknowledgments; it has given you claims upon my gratitude which I shall never deny; nor am I less sensible of your kindness than the justness of your arguments. I allow that the retirement I live in is not fitting the season of youth; I allow that religion, nature, society, all require me
to

to make exertions to repel the languor of melancholy and despair. But while I allow all this, I feel unwilling to make these exertions; a thousand bitter and corroding remembrances oppose my emerging from solitude—my again returning to a world, where I should seek in vain to have that vacuum filled up, the death of my friend has occasioned.

Belmore heard him with emotion; the loss of a friend he knew from experience to be irreparable, and a tear swelled to his eyes as he spoke. "Oh, Howard!" he exclaimed, in a voice which denoted his feelings, "I compassionate you—I sympathise with you; your sufferings revive the recollection of my own—of the agonies I endured when I lost those who were dearer to me than life. But I exerted myself to subdue these agonies; and the placid happiness

piness I now enjoy, I conceive a reward from Heaven for doing so. Never indeed do the efforts of reason and fortitude go unrewarded; let me, therefore, intreat you, my dear young friend, to make those efforts; flatter me by making me believe you deem my example worthy of imitation; and suffer me to have the felicity of again leading you into society."

From the idea of again mingling in it, however, Howard still shrunk; and it required all the eloquence of Mr. Belmore to prevail on him to promise, in the course of a few evenings, to visit him: but ere he would give this reluctant promise, he stipulated that there should be no company at the cottage.

As Mr. Belmore approached his home, he was met by Matilda. He had been much affected by his late conversation with

Howard,

Howard, and the emotions it excited were too strongly delineated on his countenance not to call forth the affectionate inquiries of Matilda. He briefly answered them, and she joined in the commiseration; he felt and expressed for his unhappy favourite. Belmore kissed her cheek, as it was bedewed with tears of pity.

“When he witnesses,” said he, “the perfections of my Matilda—when he hears of the virtues of her mother, he must forego his unjust prejudices against their sex.”

Matilda at once wished and feared to be introduced to him. Not conscious, and consequently not vain of her attractions, she could not think, like Mr. Belmore, that she should be able to overcome the prejudices he alluded to; prejudices she could not wonder at, when she reflected on the injuries which Howard hinted his be-
loved

loved friend had suffered from female perfidy: "And I should be sorry," said she to herself, "to perceive I was disliked by a person so amiable as he is represented to be."

Artless Matilda, how little were you aware of the power of your charms, the irresistible power of beauty, sweetness, and innocence, combined!

Her heart fluttered when Mr. Belmore informed her that Howard had, at last, yielded to his urgent intreaties, and promised to spend an evening with them; and so great was the dread that seized her, that she would gladly have heard she was not to have been of their party.

It is now necessary to give some kind of explanation relative to the agitation Bromley betrayed on seeing the dog. That dog had once belonged to him, and was a present

sent from him to a young female, over whose affections and honour he had triumphed by the vilest artifices. From the moment his perfidy became known to her, she withdrew herself from him; and from that period, which at the time he became acquainted with Matilda was about a year back, he had heard nothing of her. Of Ashmore he was almost entirely ignorant, as he had been in possession of the living in his neighbourhood but a short time; and as he had never heard of any connexion subsisting between him and the unfortunate girl, he knew not how to account for his having the dog, except she was an inmate in his family: if this was the case, he trembled to think his baseness would, in all probability, be disclosed to Matilda, and his designs upon her frustrated, by a premature discovery of his real character.

All

All anxiety to ascertain whether his apprehensions were just, apprehensions which caused him to be agitated in the manner we have already mentioned, he dispatched Le Rogne that very evening, to make the necessary inquiries; and felt somewhat relieved on his return, to hear that the landlord of the village inn had told him there was nobody resided at the Parsonage, but the parson himself, an old female servant, and a young girl of thirteen, as an assistant to her. Chance, therefore, he trusted, had thrown the dog into the power of Ashmore; but lest he should be mistaken, he resolved to neglect no opportunity of endeavouring to insinuate himself into the favour of Matilda, flattering himself, if he had once a hold of her heart, he should be able to draw her into any snare he might spread for her.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVI.

“ Is she not

“ As harmless as a turtle of the woods,

“ Fair as the summer beauty of the fields,

“ As op’ning flowers, untainted yet with winds,

“ The pride of Nature, and the joy of sense ?”

OTWAY’S CAIUS MARCUS.

THE evening at length arrived on which Howard had promised to visit the cottage. Timid, trembling and apprehensive Matilda almost shrunk from the idea of the approaching interview. She felt convinced he would not like her; and a kind of weight hung

hung upon her spirits, at the idea of being seen only to be disliked by a person whom she esteemed, and to whom she wished to administer all the gentle consolation in her power.

Belmore desired her not to appear till summoned by him.

With tardy and reluctant steps Howard approached the cottage. Discontent visibly clouded his countenance; a discontent expressive of displeasure against himself for being prevailed on to break his resolution.

Belmore hastened to receive him, and gave him a most cordial welcome to his humble abode.

The features of Howard gradually softening, evinced his emotions at this affectionate reception: he endeavoured, however,

ever, to conceal them; for he still felt dissatisfied with himself.

“You are very good,” said he, accepting Belmore’s hand, “I feel daily more indebted to you; but still——”

“Come,” cried Mr. Belmore “you must banish this gloom; cheerfulness and gaiety are alone known within my cottage.”

“Ah!” cried Charles, “no wonder the hearts of its inhabitants are at ease; not ruffled by care, nor corroded by agonizing remembrances.”

“Have I not,” said Belmore, “already told you I was deeply tried by adversity? No remembrances would be more bitter, more corroding than mine, did I encourage them; but instead of brooding over ills that cannot be remedied, I strive to fly from the idea of them.”

These

These words conveyed something like a reproach, which stung the haughty and susceptible spirit of Howard: he frowned—he coloured, and looked too proud to speak.

“I see,” said Mr. Belmore, “you are offended; be not so hasty in resenting: far be it from me to break the laws of hospitality by displeasing you: if I have betrayed an unwarrantable warmth in expressing the sentiments your conduct has given rise to, it is solicitude for your welfare has led me to do so.”

“Enough, enough,” replied Howard eagerly, hurt at the idea of being thought of a capricious or vindictive temper: “I am neither inflexible nor obstinate; and your wishes to serve me demand my sincerest gratitude.”

“Well,” said Belmore, smiling, as he conducted him into the parlour, there is

another person in this cottage I wish to introduce you to."

Howard started!—"You promised," said he, "I should meet no company."

"Don't be alarmed," resumed Belmore; "the person——but I will say nothing."

He opened the door of an inside apartment and, entering, took the trembling hand of Matilda: she, involuntarily, hung back:—

"No, no, indeed," said she, "I cannot go out; there is no occasion; and, besides, I am sure he would much rather be without seeing me."

"Why, my dear child," cried Belmore, "what can possibly be the matter with you? Has Patty been here to terrify your imagination, and seriously assert, if you ventured too near the madman, he would bite?"

He led her into the parlour: an agitation she could not conquer had somewhat
deadened

deadened the roseate hue of her cheeks; but the paleness that succeeded to it, rendered the expression of her countenance, if possible, more interesting! Her dark blue eyes were replete with the most bewitching softness, and the simplicity of her dress was calculated to heighten the graces of her form: her robe of white muslin was totally unornamented; and from beneath a white chip hat, carelessly tied on, and adorned with a wreath of flowers, her fine hair fell in negligent curls upon a forehead and neck of unrivalled fairness.

“ This,” said Belmore, as he presented her to Howard, who noticed her but by a slight bow, “ this is my sole companion, the being for whose sake I wish to overcome affliction; and oh! how amply has she rewarded me for the exertions I made on her account! Were I to give way to the

fullness of my heart, (continued he, still detaining her hand, his eyes now glancing with rapture at her—now directed towards Howard,) in what language—what impassioned language should I speak of her! but I will not yield to feelings, the utterance of which might pain her: all I shall say is, that she is the comfort—the treasure—the support of my declining years.”

Matilda pressed the hand which held hers, but she could not speak; a tear, however, the precious offering of sensibility and gratitude, fell from her, and proclaimed the feelings she could not express; there was a magic in that tear, as it hung, sweet emblem of affection on her cheek.

Howard beheld it with emotion; nay, he was on the point of expressing what he felt, when some sudden recollections checked him. He reflected on the easiness
with

with which women could assume the appearance of sensibility and virtue; he reflected on the sorrows he had experienced in consequence of the perfidy of one; and he felt exasperated with himself for his promptitude, as he conceived it to be imposed upon by female hypocrisy; for, to hypocrisy he now imputed all that seemed fair or excellent in the sex. With a sullen air, he continued leaning against the waincot, as he had been when Matilda entered the room, till Mr. Belmore drew a chair for him, and motioned him to be seated.

Matilda placed herself at the tea-table; she trembled—she was confused: the looks of Howard, which were directed to her, were stern and disdainful; and she sincerely wished herself out of the room, confident he would be much better pleased with her absence than her presence.

In thinking so, however, she was perhaps mistaken; Howard's heart was formed to enjoy the pleasures of society, though his afflictions had deceived him into a contrary opinion; and, notwithstanding his prejudices, he was more than half inclined to shake off the gloomy temper of his soul, and enter into conversation. Still a fear of again being liable to deception—of being thought of a versatile disposition, if he relaxed from the severity and reserve he had assumed, withheld him:—"at least, thought he, as he looked with earnestness from under his bent brows at Matilda, ere I make an effort to unbend, I will first try to discover whether this Paragon of Paragons, as she is represented to be, is not like the rest of her sex—vain, volatile, deceitful."

Matilda raised her eyes; they caught the lowering glances of Howard, and she quickly averted

averted them, while a blush tinged her cheeks.—“ Ah!” cried she to herself, “ he continues the inspection—he examines my countenance, to try, if possible, to discover my sentiments. Why,” thought she “ should I be abashed at his doing so? conscious as I am, that they are sentiments I need not be ashamed of having known.”

Animated by the reflexion of conscious innocence, she again looked up: Howard's eyes were still fastened on her; and blushing yet more deeply, she again turned from him.

He was at that instant so absorbed in thought, as to be insensible of the apparent rudeness he was committing, in so long contemplating her: his heart was agitated by the most opposite struggles. He now encouraged the idea of returning cheerfulness—now determined to indulge his sple-

netic humour, and totally repress the idea even of transitory pleasure, in the company of a female.

Belmore, who watched him attentively, beheld the earnestness with which he regarded Matilda. "Yes," said he to himself, "let him examine the ingenuous countenance of my child; in vain will he try to discover in it any traits of levity or deceit."

Howard was so much absorbed in reflexion, that Belmore twice presented him with a cup of tea without his perceiving it; at length, tapping him on the shoulder, he asked whether he was meditating "a trip to the moon, or a voyage to Lilliput? The case was different, when I was a young man," continued he gaily; "I never meditated then in a lady's company, except upon her charms!"

Howard

Howard smiled at his own absence: that smile enlivened his countenance; and Matilda could not avoid remarking to herself how much it was improved by losing its gloom.

"Come, Matilda," said Mr. Belmore, "I apply to you for subjects for the tea-table; 'tis the province of the ladies to furnish conversation for it."—She smiled. "Have you no news?" continued he. "None, indeed." "What! reside in a country village, and want topics for a tea-table! Fye, fye! Matilda; I shall for the first time be under the necessity of accusing you of stupidity: no reputations—no characters—no perfidious lovers—no deserted nymphs, to vent a little witty scandal on."

"No, my dear Sir," replied Matilda, "I have neither subjects nor talents for scandal; and even if I had, I trust your in-

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structions

structions are too deeply impressed upon my mind to permit me to indulge wit at the expence of humanity."

Howard, whose eyes had for a few minutes been withdrawn from her, again directed them to her, at these words; and Belmore thought he perceived something like mingled surprise and pleasure in his countenance: he looked from him to Matilda—he looked from her to him, and at length said, "You are very unfashionable indeed, my dear; I believe I must send you to be polished by a winter's residence in the metropolis."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Howard, with involuntary warmth, "suffer her not to quit the shades of retirement, where alone she has any chance of retaining simplicity and real feeling."

Those

Those words were unexpected—they were uttered with energy.

Matilda coloured; and Belmore began to entertain yet greater hopes than he had hitherto done, that the prejudices of this young man would at last be wholly eradicated.

He felt disappointed, however, on finding that the efforts he had made to draw him into conversation did not succeed.

After tea Belmore asked Matilda to play. His least wish had to her the nature of a command. She instantly, therefore, rose and seated herself at the instrument, though she knew she must perform to disadvantage, from the restraint and agitation she felt in Howard's presence, every glance of whose eye she imagined directed towards her for the purpose of criticising and finding fault with her.

Howard, who was fond of music, even to enthusiasm, approached the piano, as soon as she was seated at it. At first she touched the keys in a weak and tremulous manner, but by degrees she grew more composed, and exerted all the powers she was mistress of.

She played a celebrated march in the most inimitable manner; the notes, harmonious and animating, seemed to inspire Howard with rapture! his cheeks glowed—his eyes kindled to the brightest radiancy, and he looked as if he could that moment have fought reputation, even in “the cannon’s mouth.”

She changed: she touched the keys in the softest style; the sound, at once plaintive and solemn, just stole upon the ear: she sung—“Peace to the souls of the Heroes, their deeds were great in arms.”

The

The sudden transition affected Howard, beyond expression; the animation of his countenance vanished, his cheek grew pale; and a deep sigh burst from him. "It is too much!" he at length exclaimed, hastily moving from the instrument, "it is insupportable!" cried he, clasping his hands together, and flying out of the room.

Belmore hastily followed him. He was standing at the door, his countenance indicative of his feelings.

Matilda, frightened at his sudden emotion, arose from her seat, and watched him in silence, with a sympathy which perhaps she would have been sorry to have had perceived.

Belmore took him by the arm: Howard, who appeared eager to quit the house, quickly disengaged it: "You must permit me to leave you," cried he, in a hurried accent,

accent, addressing Mr. Belmore; "I am not in a frame of mind to continue any longer with you."

"I will not—I cannot let you go," said Mr. Belmore. He again seized his arm: Howard attempted not again to withdraw it; but in sullen silence returned with him to the parlour.

"Ah!" said Matilda, as she saw him re-enter it, "he now thinks of his lost Edward." After the silence of a few minutes, Belmore proposed a ramble in the garden; a proposal to which Howard acceded in silence. Matilda accompanied them to it, but walked rather at a distance from them, often stopping to survey a knot of flowers planted by her own hand, or a little spot which owed its peculiar beauty to her superintending care. Belmore, who attentively watched Howard, saw his eyes
often

often wander in the direction she took, and almost involuntarily began to speak of her. He expatiated on her virtues, with all the warmth of affection; he called her the sweet consoler of his griefs—the most amiable, the most excellent of human beings.

Howard (not unnaturally perhaps) inquired into the connexion between them. On learning the ties which bound Belmore to her—on learning she was the orphan daughter of the friends he had so tenderly loved and bitterly lamented, a sudden interest seemed excited in his bosom for her, of which his looks were expressive.

Matilda, unconscious of being the subject of conversation, at length joined them, and they seated themselves upon the sod seat at the top of the garden.

The last beams of the sun were now fading in the west; the evening was calm
and

and delightful, and the sounds that fluctuated on the quiet air, were only expressive of peace and harmony. A lovely and extensive prospect was stretched around; and from the adjacent meadows, the labourers were seen, repairing to their happy homes, to enjoy the sweets of their industry.

“What blessings,” said Mr. Belmore, “are enjoyed by our English peasants! and not less wise than humane is the Government which permits them to enjoy these blessings; for, by being free, each has an interest in the prosperity of his country; whereas, in some northern kingdoms, where the common privileges of mankind are denied the poor—where they are kept in a state of slavish subjection—where they are compelled to bend the knee of servile obedience to their proud task-masters, and debarred the rewards due to their industry,
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cultivation is neglected, to the great prejudice of the community."

"True," cried Howard; "with indignation and horror, I have often thought on the cruelties with which, in many parts of the world; the indigent sons of the creation are treated. Happily for them, their minds are generally suffered to remain in a state of savage barbarism, as an improvement of mental powers would, by quickening sensibility, double the wretchedness of their situations.

Bèlmore, desirous of changing a subject which had a tendency to revive the gloom and asperity of Howard, said, gaily, they were now in the place where Matilda held her court: "The flowers," cried he, "form a gaudy assembly for her, and the music of nature is her concert; she feels, indeed, a true relish for the pleasures of rural life"—

"And

“ And thus gives a proof of the elegance and refinement of her mind,” said Howard, (whose countenance had again brightened) addressing himself to her.

This was the first time, except by his eyes, that he had in any manner taken the slightest notice of her ; and these words were so unexpected, that Matilda, confused and surprised, looked at him without speaking.

Offended at not receiving an answer, which he evidently expected, a frown instantly contracted his brow ; and just as she was opening her lips, he arose precipitately, and left the recess.

Belmore and Matilda rose and followed him.

She felt still more confused, and was almost tempted to blame such unaccountable caprice ; but the recollection of his misfortunes intervened to check the resentment it excited.

Howard

Howard reached the parlour first, and had just taken up his hat, with an intention of departing, when Belmore entered it. The cloth was already laid for supper, to which Belmore, with some difficulty, prevailed on him to stay; perhaps all his entreaties would have been unavailing, but that Howard was conscious he had not made such a return for the kind attentions and benevolent efforts of Mr. Belmore, as he had a right to expect. From this consciousness, or some other secret motive, as he sat at supper, he gradually unbent from his reserve, and entered into a conversation in which Matilda bore a share.

He at length departed: as he quitted the cottage, he pressed the hand which Belmore extended to him; "Yes, from my soul," exclaimed he, "I thank you for your friendship and attention."

"Convince

“ Convince me of your regard, by letting me see you often,” said Belmore:—
“ ’tis from actions, not words, I judge of sincerity.” Howard shook his head—dropped his hand, and retired without speaking.

Mr. Belmore asked Matilda what she thought of him? she blushed and hesitated a little. “ I think,” said she, her looks rather averted from Mr. Belmore, “ that he is unhappy.” “ Oh! you thought that,” said Mr. Belmore, “ before you saw him: I ask you whether you think him unpleasing?” “ No, I think—I believe not; ’tis really impossible to know what he is, in so short a time.” Mr. Belmore smiled; but as it was a smile caused by a sudden idea he chose to keep secret, we do not think ourselves at liberty to account for it.

CHAP.

CHAP. XII.

“ Virtue alone is true nobility :

“ Let your own acts immortalize your name ;

“ 'Tis poor relying on another's fame ;

“ For take the pillars but away, and all

“ The superstructure must in ruins fall ;

“ As a vine droops, when by divorce remov'd

“ From the embraces of the elm she lov'd.”

STEVENS'S JUVENAL.

WHILE at breakfast the next morning, Mr. Ashmore called upon them; and as soon as it was over, he and Mr. Belmore went out together. As soon as they were gone, Matilda sat down to her piano, and played over

over the pieces which had so powerfully affected Howard the preceding evening. As she played, she experienced emotions similar to those he had then manifested; emotions excited more by the recollection of his, than the strains which had occasioned them; as the martial music swelled upon her ear, she thought of the glow it had called into his countenance,—the life—the fire it had kindled in his eyes. When she changed—when she again sung of the heroes who had fallen in battle, his sudden gloom—his agitation was pictured to her imagination, and an involuntary sigh heaved her bosom. At this moment, a low noise near her, made her raise her eyes from the instrument; and she beheld, to her extreme astonishment and confusion, Bromley standing by it, his eyes expressive of rapture and admiration. She started—she coloured,
and

and was too much discomposed for some time, to ask him how long he had been in the room.

He had been much longer in it, indeed, than she suspected, rather pleased than otherwise, at her being too much engrossed to perceive him; as her being so, gave him an opportunity of gazing on her without interruption.

He had watched with the most rapturous admiration the changes of her countenance, her varying complexion, the humid lustre of her eyes; never had she appeared half so interesting—half so lovely; and he felt more than ever determined to let neither difficulties nor dangers deter him from persevering in his designs upon her. Scarcely could he controul the feelings she had inspired; he could not refrain from snatching her hand, and raising it to his lips, while
his

his eyes spoke a language to her which heightened her blushes, and made her avert her looks from his.

Not all his entreaties could prevail on her to resume her seat at the piano; and taking up her work, she endeavoured, by seeming engaged about it, to avoid his glances. At first her manner was cool and reserved to him, as she felt displeased at what she conceived his intrusion, and was by no means in a humour for conversing with him.

Bromley, however, not of a temper to be easily repulsed, pretended not to notice her coldness, and by degrees drew her into a conversation on some interesting subjects.

Among these, the fine arts and the perfection they had attained was mentioned; and he at length enquired whether she was an admirer of paintings?

She

She answered in the affirmative. "Well then," said he, with an air of satisfaction, "if you and Mr. Belmore will favour me with your company this evening, I think I can shew you some at my house which will meet your approbation; they have been reckoned extremely good by connoisseurs. The walk will be a pleasant one; and I will call upon you after dinner."

Matilda had no objection to the proposal; but could not, or rather would not give any positive answer to it, without consulting Mr. Belmore. Bromley accordingly waited for his return, and having received a propitious answer from him, hastened home, to have preparations made for the reception of his expected visitors, whom he determined, if possible, to surprise into admiration. He was delighted at the idea of displaying to them the grandeur of his

improvements, and the interior of his elegant house, flattering himself that such a display would increase his consequence in their eyes, and perhaps accelerate the completion of his designs on Matilda; as, like the generality of the world, he conceived show to have great influence upon the female mind.

He counted the hours till his return to the cottage, where he found Belmore and Matilda ready to attend him. In their way to his house, they passed Hillgrove's, where Patty, who had been asked to join the party, impatiently watched their approach. The moment they appeared, she flew forward to meet them, and, in a hasty manner, commenced a description of Miss Wilson's wedding, which she had been at, a day or two before. Bromley affected to rally her a little, on being too severe in this description,

tion, and Matilda was not sorry when their arrival at his house put a stop to her further eloquence on the subject.

Bromley conducted his guests into a spacious saloon, superbly furnished, where tea, coffee, and a variety of rich cakes, were provided for them. From hence he led them to the picture gallery, which contained a numerous as well as a choice collection of paintings; among these a number of family portraits were conspicuous, but these, as totally uninteresting to those who were neither acquainted nor connected with the originals, were looked over in silence by the guests of Bromley, to his great mortification, not on account of any veneration he felt for them, but merely because it deprived him of an opportunity of expatiating on the antiquity and consequence of his family; of the virtues or

renown that perhaps distinguished some members of it, he never thought; it was of titles and descent, not of merit and glory, he was proud. The admiration and attention, however, with which some fine historical pieces were viewed, compensated in some degree for the mortification he felt at the neglect of his ancestors.

Patty's observations and inquiries excited much amusement. A portrait of Cleopatra, in the act of dissolving the pearl, caught her attention, and she eagerly asked what she was about; on being informed, she shook her head, and declared it was a very silly action. She inquired the reason of the melancholy visible in the countenance of Jane Shore; and, on Mr. Belmore's giving her the poetical history of the lovely culprit, expressed much pity, and said, "had she lived now-a-days, she would
not

not have found people so barbarous on account of such a trifle."

After his guests had completely satisfied their curiosity, Bromley led them through a magnificent suite of rooms, which terminated in folding doors that opened upon a fine terrace, shaded with high trees, and commanding an extensive view of the improvements. From this terrace they descended to a flowery vale, in the centre of which was a noble lake, encompassed by a variety of shrubs and trees; here they saw a richly-ornamented barge, with two young rowers in it, at anchor. Bromley inquired whether any of his party had an objection to the water; and being answered in the negative, he took the hand of Matilda, and led her into the barge, Belmore and Patty followed; and as soon as they were seated,

the boys dipped their oars into the water, and pushed from the shore,

The scene was truly picturesque; the banks of the lake were clothed with the finest verdure; the waving trees which dotted them, together with the glories of the setting sun, were reflected in the water; amid these trees, groups of cattle were scattered, some reposing in soft tranquillity, and others ruminating o'er the stream, while around was stretched a prospect diversified by all the charms of cultivation, and only terminated by the clouds.

A soft breeze, which spread a gentle curl o'er the bosom of the lake, was impregnated with the most delicious perfumes from some adjacent shrubberies, and to the harmony of French horns, stationed in a neighbouring wood, the paddling oars seemed to keep time. Matilda was delighted; and Bromley,

in

in raptures at the pleasure she evinced, imbibed additional spirits, and exerted himself more than ever to appear agreeable, After rowing through most of the meanders of the lake, the boat stopped before a Gothic building, to which there was an ascent from the water by a flight of steps.

It looked like the ruins of an old temple: the windows, which were sunk within the walls, were enriched with painted glass; a few ancient trees grew about it, and moss and ivy crept over its surface.

Here the party landed, and were agreeably surprised, on passing through an arched entrance, to find themselves in a very pleasant apartment, elegantly furnished, and containing some cases of books, and several musical instruments. Two maid-servants, neatly dressed, were stationed here to serve

the refreshments, with which a large table in an aclove was covered, consisting of ices, lemonade, orgeat, and the most delicious fruits and sweetmeats.

“ This,” said Bromley, “ I style my hermitage; here, whenever I am in a contemplative mood, I sequester myself, to enjoy the pleasures of solitude and reflexion.”

“ It is well adapted, indeed,” said Mr. Belmore, “ for such a purpose, when the mind, languid or fatigued, seeks to revive its powers by meditation and retirement.”

Matilda, after examining the apartment, wandered to a window, from whence she had a distant view of Howard's solitary retreat; o'er its moss-grown towers additional glooms were now spread, and, as Matilda gazed upon it, her spirits gradually sunk at the idea of the sorrows which could have induced

induced a being, in all the prime of life, to abandon society, and take up his abode in so melancholy a dwelling.—“ Ah!” said she to herself, “ how shall I rejoice if Mr. Belmore’s arguments prevail on him to quit it!—how shall I rejoice if I hear the wounds of his heart are ever likely to be healed!” “ La!” said Patty, who approached her at this moment, curious to see what it was which engrossed her attention so particularly, for her eyes were rivetted to one spot, “ La! I declare” said she, looking over her shoulder, “ you can see the place where the madman lives from this window; well to be sure, I never was so much afraid of any one in my life. I wish he was either removed from this part of the country, or confined in one of the vaults belonging to the building.”

“Are you not a little barbarian, to wish such a thing?” cried Bromley. She laughed and repeated her fears. “This same Recluse, must certainly be a very extraordinary being,” resumed Bromley; “I should like to know whether his oddities proceed from a disordered brain, or an irritated temper. I once or twice met him accidentally, and endeavoured to ascertain the point, by making an attempt to converse with him; but he repulsed the effort with high disdain, and quitted me abruptly.”

Both Belmore and Matilda continued silent relative to Howard; prudence and delicacy forbade their making him the subject of discourse, lest they might, by revealing any particulars of him, excite curiosity and impertinence, and subject him to intrusions which they were convinced would counteract

counteract all they had yet done, or wished to do for him.

They continued till a late hour in the hermitage; Matilda, at the particular request of Bromley, played several favourite airs upon the guitar, and accompanied them with her voice. They then returned through a wilderness of sweets to the house, where an elegant supper was prepared for them. The gloom which had stolen upon the spirits of Matilda, gradually yielded to the cheerfulness that reigned around her; and the party did not break up till it was far beyond the hour at which she and Mr. Belmore had latterly accustomed themselves to retire to repose.

They found Bromley's coach waiting for them, in which he insisted on accompanying them home. In their way thither, Patty was dropped at her father's, highly delighted

with the evening's entertainment. Bromley took an opportunity, while Belmore was rapping at the hall door, which the maid, in order to prevent any disagreeable surprise, had wisely bolted, to kiss Matilda's hand with the most passionate fervour, and whisper to her his adoration.

The confusion, however, this liberty occasioned, as well as the pleasure she had experienced throughout the evening was forgotten, when, on entering the cottage, she learned Howard had been at it. "How unfortunate," said Belmore, "that we were out!" "Ah!" cried Matilda, with an energy she was not aware of, "I regret it beyond expression; had I entertained an expectation of such a visit, I should have requested Mr. Bromley's invitation might have been declined, for upon our time and
our

our attention the unfortunate have particular claims."

"True," replied Belmore, "nor can any amusement—any pleasure, to a mind of sensibility, yield such delight as is derived from administering consolation to the unhappy, and stealing them from the remembrance of their sorrows. I rejoice (added he) to hear of this visit; it seems as if our Recluse was again inclined to relish the sweets of society; I will call on him tomorrow, and endeavour, if necessary, to strengthen his inclination to return to it."

As Mr. Belmore had imagined, Howard was again inclined indeed to mingle in society. The arguments of Mr. Belmore, so convincing to his reason—the calm pleasure he had experienced at his house the preceding evening, so soothing to his feelings, began to give him a distaste to his
present

present manner of living he had never before experienced.

As he pensively sat in his gloomy abode the following evening, he revolved the whole of Belmore's conduct; the humanity which had induced him to visit his retreat, the mildness, the moderation with which he bore his caprices and perverseness: his heart swelled with gratitude as he reviewed his kindness, and he bitterly reproached himself for having made no suitable return for it. "I will no longer," cried he, suddenly starting from his seat—"I will no longer appear ungrateful or obstinate in his eyes—I will no longer withhold from him that pleasure which a mind like his must feel at finding its benevolent exertions have not been unavailing. I will go to him directly, and convince him his efforts have been crowned with success."

Scarcely,

Scarcely, however, had he reached the gate which opened into the ruin, ere some sudden recollections crossed his mind, which made him pause, and, in a few minutes, return, with "pensive steps and slow," to the seat he had so eagerly quitted.

After sitting some time in a gloomy reverie, he raised his heavy eyes and surveyed the melancholy scene surrounding him. No images but those of horror and desolation met his view: the brown hue of the neglected and tangled shrubs was mournfully contrasted by the long verdant grass which grew amidst the broken tomb-stones, and the mouldering walls of the Abbey seemed ready to fall before the first rude gale. Never did the scene appear so dreary, so desolate as at the present moment; he involuntarily shuddered as he surveyed it, and
rising,

rising, ascended the hill at the back of the building. From hence was an extensive prospect, well calculated to banish all "fadeness but despair;" but no feature in the landscape had now power to attract his attention but the cottage of Belmore:—viewed at this distance, with the evening sun glittering upon the windows, and the sheep quietly feeding upon the lawn before it, it seemed a little Paradise.

His mind gradually lost its depression, as he gazed upon it, and thought of the serenity enjoyed by its inmates. "Ah! how happy are they now!" cried he; "theirs are those domestic joys, which, but for the basest perfidy, I might have experienced; joys which, alas! I must now never hope to attain!" He sighed, and for a moment bent his eyes to the ground; again he raised and directed them towards the cottage, beautifully

tifully conspicuous amidst the dark woods surrounding it. He pictured to himself Matilda, seated at the instrument, from whence the preceding evening she had drawn forth such exquisite melody, and Belmore hanging enraptured over her. He recalled the magic of her voice—he felt it again thrilling through his heart, and calming its painful emotions. His resolution to revisit the cottage returned; and descending the hill, he instantly took the road leading to it. “As for the girl,” said he, as he proceeded, “notwithstanding the amusement she is capable of giving from her musical abilities, I should be better pleased to find her absent; Mr. Belmore’s conversation is all I desire.”

He found the servant-maid sitting at the hall-door, at work. On inquiring for her master, she told him, though rather hesitatingly,

tatingly, (in consequence of the panic his sudden appearance had thrown her into, for, like many of her neighbours, she entertained a strange opinion of him) that 'Squire Bromley had fetched him, and Miss Matilda to look at his house, and she did not suppose they would be back for a long while.

Howard turned abruptly from her to conceal the chagrin her information gave him—a chagrin he was exasperated with himself for feeling, and which he would have been mortified beyond expression to think any one should have perceived, or even suspected.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVIII.

“ My ugly guilt flies in my conscious face.”

LEE.

BELMORE, agreeably to his intention the preceding night, went early in the morning to Howard, to try and prevail on him to dine that day at the cottage.

Matilda felt an inquietude she could not account for, and vainly endeavoured to divert by her usual avocations; neither working,

working, reading, nor playing, would answer the purpose for which she resorted to them; and at length putting on her hat, she strolled out, the way Mr. Belmore had taken, impatient, even to a degree of anxiety, to hear whether his invitation was accepted.

She had not proceeded far, when she met Bromley, posting to the cottage; she never felt less inclined to converse, and would have avoided him, if possible. He accosted her familiarly, hoped she had received no cold from her aquatic excursion the preceding evening; then, without waiting for an answer, said the question was unnecessary, as she looked quite as blooming and beautiful as ever; inquired whither she was going, and begged to know whether he might have the happiness of attending her.

Matilda, who earnestly wished to get rid of him, answered him carelessly. She

was

was quite undetermined; she said, about the way she should go, or how long she should stay out, and entreated him not to give up a pleasant walk on her account. He assured her no walk, no place, no situation could be pleasant to him without her society: these words he accompanied with a look and an attempt to take her hand, which increased Matilda's coldness to him. This coldness, however, could not drive him away; and Matilda, at length reflecting on the pains he had taken to amuse her and his other guests the preceding evening, began to accuse herself of something like ingratitude and rudeness, to make amends for which, she unbent her brow, and entered into conversation with him.

On coming to a little hillock on the road side, which Belmore must pass in his way from the Abbey to the cottage, Matilda
fat

fat down, under the pretence of fatigue, and Bromley followed her example.

They had not been seated many minutes, when Howard and Belmore made their appearance. Matilda instantly started up, with a flutter at her heart which caused her cheeks to glow: it was not long ere they perceived her; and as they drew near, Mr. Belmore called upon her to unite with him in trying to prevail on Howard to spend the day with them. "He has hitherto withstood my intreaties," said he, "but I flatter myself he will not be so ungallant as to refuse complying with yours." Matilda with a still deeper blush; as her eyes encountered those of Howard, from whence all gloom was removed, was beginning to speak, when Bromley, who had hitherto been unobserved, in consequence of his lolling at the back of the hillock, where he
had

had been collecting some wild flowers to twine into a garland, as he said, for Matilda, suddenly started up, and, after asking Belmore how he was, and casting a malicious and disdainful glance at Howard, held up his flowery spoils, and avowed the purpose for which they had been gathered.

Belmore was mortified at his presence, as he feared it would drive Howard away: in thinking so, he was not mistaken; the brightness of his countenance directly vanished, and slightly touching his hat, he precipitately departed, notwithstanding the intreaties of Belmore for his stay, and the eloquent sollicitations of Matilda's eyes.

Belmore, exceedingly vexed at his departure, drew Matilda's arm under his, without speaking, and proceeded towards home. "Lord!" cried Bromley, following them, "I really fear I have frightened the
gen-

gentleman away—I really am vastly concerned at the idea; not indeed that I think you have any great reason to regret my doing so, as I can't imagine his company would prove very delectable. For Heaven's sake, my dear Sir (addressing himself to Belmore,) by what magic did you allure him from his cell!" Mr. Belmore coolly replied, "no magic was necessary to cooperate with the dictates of reason."

Bromley was too discerning not to perceive his company could readily be dispensed with at present; he therefore determined on taking himself off, not a little enraged at the idea of his entertainment the preceding evening being given to no purpose, as appeared by the manner in which both Matilda and Belmore had treated him. He was a little pacified, however, at going away, by receiving an
invitation

invitation from Mr. Belmore to tea in the evening; an invitation indeed which was given as some kind of atonement for the coldness with which he had behaved to him, and for which (as in a similar instance Matilda had done) he could not avoid reproaching himself when he reflected on the polite and hospitable manner in which he had been treated by him.

“ I had almost prevailed on Howard,” said he, as soon as Bromley turned his steps from them, “ to pass the day with us, and am almost sure, but for the unexpected appearance of Bromley, he would have done so.”

So thought Matilda, likewise, and the idea made her regret more than perhaps she would have chose to acknowledge, her having met with the latter.

All signs of regret were banished from her looks, however, long before he came in the evening. Delighted at being again received both by Matilda and Mr. Belmore with good humour and cordiality, he was chatting away with more than wonted animation, when the parlour door slowly opened, and Mr. Ashmore entered. The instant Bromley saw him, his lips closed—his colour changed, and every trace of vivacity forsook him; he felt involuntarily awed and abashed in the presence of a person to whom he suspected his baseness was known, and who, if this was the case, he knew, from the virtues he himself possessed, must despise him. He feared to look—he feared to speak before him, lest his looks should excite suspicions, or his sentiments, often so little corresponding with

with his past actions, provoke an unqualified accusation of hypocrisy.

Ashmore, probably from expecting to find him there, betrayed neither surprise nor embarrassment at seeing him at the cottage; a placid smile, as usual, sat upon his features, and he entered into conversation with Belmore and Matilda. In this conversation Bromley vainly endeavoured to join; and finding it impossible to shake off his restraint, he withdrew immediately after tea, assigning a sudden indisposition as a reason for doing so, as well as for the alteration which had taken place in his manner, and which, he was well convinced, it was necessary to account for.

As soon as he was gone, Ashmore inquired how long Belmore had known him: on being informed, he asked a few other questions concerning him, not by any means,

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however,

however, calculated to awaken suspicion; and the conversation relative to him was then entirely dropped. The evening was showery, and the gentlemen being prevented walking, sat down to backgammon; and Matilda repaired to her chamber, where she amused herself with a book, from which however her thoughts often wandered to Howard, and more than once her eyes were turned from it to the road, in hopes of seeing him; but these hopes were disappointed, though perhaps, had Howard followed the bent of his inclination, this might not have been the case.

He had beheld Belmore approaching his dreary habitation in the morning, with a pleasure which but a short time before he thought he should never more have experienced; and though he did not absolutely promise to pass the day with him, he did

did not refuse accompanying him in a ramble. The promise, however, which Mr. Belmore desired, he would, in all probability, have given him, but for the unexpected appearance of Bromley, whom, he had reason to think a frivolous and malicious character; and who, he concluded, would be of the party at the cottage: he could not, therefore, endure the idea of going to it.

“No,” said he to himself, “secretly exasperated with Matilda, whom he had been inclined to think, notwithstanding his prejudices, superior to the rest of her sex; “no, the company of a malignant coxcomb, and a coquettish girl, would be insupportable.”

Scarcely, however, had he left them, ere he began to think he had been too hasty, and to condemn himself for not endeavouring to controul his feelings. “If I per-

severe in such conduct," thought he, "I must at length lose the esteem of Mr. Belmore; that esteem which has been such a source of consolation to me: the richest fund of good-nature and patience may at length be exhausted by caprice and obstinacy." He paused, and felt inclined to turn back and to acknowledge he had been to blame; but when he considered such conduct would more than ever expose him to the imputation of caprice, he checked this impulse, and proceeded to the Abbey, resolved to postpone the acknowledgement he meditated, to another day.

Beyond the next day he could not defer it, and was accordingly on his way to the cottage, when he was met by Belmore, who accosted him with his usual cordiality, and proposed his accompanying him to a meadow which was mowing. "If you promise,
however,

however, to spend the day with me, I give you your choice," said he, "either to come with me, or repair to the cottage, where you will find Miss Stanley."

"Then, like a wise man," replied Howard, half smiling, "I will be guided by prudence instead of inclination, and attend you;" well aware that the danger of a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Stanley would not be inferior to the pleasure.

They accordingly repaired to the meadow, which exhibited a scene of joyous industry, highly gratifying to the benevolence of their minds.

They must, indeed, be destitute of the social charities of life who do not rejoice at beholding the earth teeming with increase, and the husbandman rejoicing amidst prospects of plenty.

The

The pleasure which resulted to Howard from the scene was depicted on his countenance, and Mr. Belmore rejoiced to behold his feelings resuming their natural bias.

"How bounteous is Providence to mankind!" cried he, actuated by similar feelings; "how numerous are the blessings with which it has interspersed the cares and sorrows, necessarily annexed to humanity, to check the arrogance and levity we are all so liable to, and make us remember our transitory state!"

Howard acknowledged the truth of his observation; and they continued to ramble about till the sun becoming vertical, compelled them to take refuge under an old thorn, which enwreathing its boughs on high, formed a thick and delightful shade.

A rapid stream that murmured near it,

gave

gave an air of coolness to the spot, and the ground immediately around it was thickly inlaid with wild flowers: here they inhaled the fragrance of the new-mown hay, and enjoyed the rustic mirth that was going on among the peasants.

“ If Matilda was here, we might dine pleasantly beneath these spreading boughs,” said Mr. Belmore; “ the sweetness of the air, and the beauty of the prospect, would render a repast here truly delightful :”—Howard was of the same opinion. Mr. Belmore, therefore, dispatched a message to Matilda by a peasant boy, desiring her to join him without delay, and have provisions, with every thing requisite for their accommodation at dinner, brought along with her.

Matilda obeyed his summons with alacrity, and tripped on with a small basket of

fresh fruit, nicely covered over with vine-leaves, upon her arm, and followed by the maid, bearing a larger one, in which were all the requisites for a comfortable dinner.

“ Dear Sir,” cried she, quickening her pace, as she approached Mr. Belmore, “ this was a delightful thought, so——” She paused—she almost started; for at this instant she beheld Howard, and surprise painted her cheeks with blushes,

“ Like colours o’er the morning skies,

“ As bright, as transient too.”

Howard also coloured; but not from pleasure, he endeavoured to persuade himself. He tried to think the company of Matilda no acquisition, and secretly resolved to resume his reserve the moment she appeared. This resolution, however, he found impossible to put into practice, so harmonized were his feelings by the present scene.

The

The cloth was laid upon the grass; and the provisions being produced, Matilda feasted herself by Mr. Belmore, who was delighted at the pleasure she seemed to experience. "Oh!" exclaimed this amiable man in the fullness of his heart, "how much to be preferred is the serenity of a country life, its innocent and tranquil pleasures, to the noise, the bustle, the dissipation of a town one; to those amusements, which instead of unbending the mind, bewilder the senses and fatigue the spirits! What enemies to their own happiness are those who forsake the sweet and simple scenes of nature, for the haunts of vice, of folly, and intemperance! How much to be regretted is the infatuation that leads them to do so! how much to be pitied are they for yielding to it!"

M 6

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“And why,” asked Howard, “since thus attached to the serenity of a country life, do you urge me to quit it, and return to the great world?”

“’Tis not a country life; ’tis gloom—’tis solitude—’tis indolence I urge you to give up,” replied Belmore: “had you any pursuit to follow—had you any tie to bind you to it, I think a continuance in the country would rather promote than injure your happiness; but as that is not the case, as you have no avocation here to employ your time—as you are unconnected and single”—Howard started at these words, sighed deeply, and averted his eyes from Mr. Belmore. “As you are single,” repeated Mr. Belmore, after a pause caused by the emotion Howard had betrayed, “and a fine young fellow, the busy world is your proper sphere.”

Howard

Howard again sighed. "I will return to it," said he, "though without a hope of recovering my lost happiness."

Mr. Belmore perceiving him relapsing into melancholy, exerted himself to try and dissipate it."

His efforts were soon seconded by Mr. Ashmore, who, in crossing a neighbouring field, espied the little party, and hastened to them. He was received with the utmost pleasure by Mr. Belmore and Matilda, and sat down to partake of their humble repast.

Howard and Ashmore were not unknown to each other; the latter having visited him, prompted by feelings similar to those which had induced Belmore to do so. The reception, however, he met with, displeased him so much, that he never attempted to repeat his visit.

Howard

Howard at first felt sorry that he had joined their party; but, by degrees, the mildness and benevolence of his manner reconciled him to his company.

"We should appear a curious group," said Matilda, smiling, "to spectators at a distance; they would take us, in all probability, for a set of strolling gypsies."

"Or suppose," cried Mr. Belmore, "a forcerefs and magicians; your looks would certainly bear testimony against us."

Whilst conversing, an itinerant family of musicians, consisting of a husband, a wife, and two children, approached them; the husband played on the violin, the wife on the hurdy-gurdy, and the children alternately on the tamborine. The lively strains of the former, and the antick measures of the latter, soon caused a suspension of labour. Mr. Belmore, who delighted in promoting

promoting innocent mirth and contributing to the happiness of his fellow-creatures, ordered the fragments of his feast to be distributed amongst them, and rewarded them still more liberally afterwards, for the hilarity they had given rise to.

This hilarity, instead of exhilarating the spirits of Howard, seemed rather to depress them; it seemed to awaken painful remembrances in his mind, and a deeper gloom than usual sat upon his features.

Mr. Belmore, in hopes of dissipating it by social converse, detained him in the field till the hour of toil was over, and the labourers were departing from it. He then endeavoured to prevail on him to spend the remainder of the evening at the cottage; but his efforts to do so were ineffectual. Howard, however, refused him in a manner which proved that it was not from caprice,

caprice, but from real melancholy, which needed the indulgence of retirement, that he declined his invitation.

They parted from him at his dreary abode, over which the setting sun diffused a solemn glory, that rendered its decay still more awful and conspicuous.—The heart of Matilda sunk as she beheld him retreating amidst its desolated walls; and the pleasing impression the amusements of the day had made upon her mind, gave place to regret for him.

“ I rejoice to find,” said Ashmore, addressing Mr. Belmore, as they pursued their way to the cottage, “ that your exertions relative to Mr. Howard are likely to become more successful than mine.”

“ I trust they may be successful,” said Mr. Belmore; “ it will indeed give me inexpressible pleasure, if I can ever consider myself

myself the happy instrument of restoring to society a person so eminently formed to adorn it as this young man.

CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

“ I’m pleas’d and pain’d since first her eyes I saw.”

DRYDEN’S CONQUEST OF GRANADA.

NOTWITHSTANDING Bromley’s natural levity, his feelings at this period were extremely painful; fearful as he was, that his baseness was known to Ashmore, and that his knowledge of it would lead to the exposure of it; an exposure which could not fail of depriving him of the good opinion of the world (which he by no means dis-

disregarded), and counteracting, in all probability, his designs upon Matilda. Had he imagined he possessed any influence over her heart, he would not have felt half so uneasy at the idea of his conduct been discovered to her, well knowing that love is prone to pardon, and overlook offences; but notwithstanding his vanity, he could not flatter himself with an idea of having made that progress in her affections he desired, and consequently dreaded, if his villainy was disclosed to her at present, she would for ever after shun him.

After much deliberation, therefore, he determined, in order to prevent the consequences that might result from a premature discovery of it, to propose to her a clandestine marriage, under such pretences as he hoped would impose upon her credulity and inexperience; flattering himself, that
from

from interested motives, she might permit him to obtain that triumph which from more tender ones she would not allow him.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that this marriage he meant should be a fictitious one. He had already, as has been mentioned, succeeded in a scheme of a similar nature.

If lucky enough to do so, now it was his determination to take such measures as should prevent Matilda from being ever troublesome to him after he grew weary (which he had no doubt would be the case) of her.

His plans once arranged, he watched with the utmost anxiety for an opportunity of making his meditated proposal, acting with such circumspection, that neither Belmore nor Matilda could possibly object to his visits.

Ere

Ere he obtained, however, the opportunity he desired, an incident occurred which had nearly betrayed him to Matilda.—As she and Patty were walking one evening, about sun-set, in a lonely road, they were met by him on horseback, returning from a gentleman's house, where he had spent the day, and where his libations to Bacchus had been quite too potent for his head. The moment he saw Matilda, he leaped from his horse, and giving it in charge to his groom, whom he ordered to proceed home, seized her hand, with a vehemence which alarmed her, swearing at the same time she was the most lovely girl in the world; and she—and she only could make him blessed. Matilda, with much displeasure, tried to disengage herself from him, as the situation she perceived he was in could not excuse to her the freedom of his manner; but her efforts

efforts to do so were vain; he held her by a firm grasp, insisted on her accompanying him to the hermitage, and desired Patty to leave them.

Patty, offended by his neglecting her, with an air of high disdain was walking off, when Matilda, who by this time he had drawn towards a shady path, leading into a retired part of his own grounds, forcibly broke from him, and running after her companion, caught her by the arm, and hurried on.

Bromley pursued them; and again seizing Matilda's hand, swore she should not leave him. Patty, still more enraged, now tried to disengage herself from Matilda; but Matilda holding her by the gown, turned to Bromley, and with a look expressive of the resentment she felt, commanded him to release her.

In

Her look and manner restored him to instant recollection ; and secretly cursing himself for his boldness and temerity, he dropped her hand, and attempted to apologise for his conduct. To this apology, however, Matilda paid no attention: she quitted him indignantly, and, on reaching farmer Hillgrove's, procured a man to attend her home, lest she should again be molested.

She found Mr. Belmore in the parlour. The flutter of her spirits had not, by any means, subsided; and her agitation called forth his tender inquiries. These inquiries Matilda endeavoured to evade, from an apprehension of the consequences that might result from his knowing the behaviour of Bromley; but he was too much interested about her to permit any evasion, and by degrees drew from her the particulars he desired

desired to learn. He felt greatly exasperated at the conduct of Bromley, which even the situation he was described to be in, could not palliate in his opinion.

In a few minutes, however, his displeasure was more than counterbalanced by the satisfaction he experienced at having so fair an opportunity as the present, for inquiring into the state of Matilda's heart; an inquiry he had long been desirous of making, in consequence of some secret observations he had made, as well as a suspicion of the attachment of Bromley, notwithstanding all the pains he had taken to avoid seeming too particular to Matilda. As soon therefore as she had recovered her composure, he led, in the most delicate manner, to the question he wished to ask; and intreated to know whether, if Bromley made proposals for her, she would accept them. Matilda,

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do not sacrifice immortal talents to fleeting jealousy ; you who ever applaud the flights of genius ; that conqueror without conquered, that victor without spoil which draws from eternity to enrich time.

“ With what confidence did nature and life once inspire me ! I believed that every unhappiness came from not possessing sufficient thought and feeling ; and that it was possible on earth to have a foretaste of celestial felicity which is only permanence of enthusiasm and constancy in love.

“ No, I do not repent this generous exaltation—it is not that which causes me to shed those tears that water the dust which is to receive me. I should have fulfilled the object of my destiny, I should have been worthy of the benefits of Heaven, had I consecrated my sounding lyre to celebrate the divine bounty manifested in the universe.

“ Thou wilt not reject, O God ! the tribute of genius, the homage of poetry is

religious, and the wings of thought lift the soul to thee !

“ There is nothing narrow, nothing base, nothing confined in religion. It is immense, infinite, eternal, and so far from genius turning the mind from it, imagination, from its first flight passes the boundaries of human life, and the sublime of every kind is only a reflection of the Deity.

“ Ah ! had I loved none but him, had I placed my head in Heaven, sheltered from the storm of human affections, I should not have been untimely blasted ; phantoms would not have taken the place of my brilliant chimeras. Unhappy me ! my genius if it still subsist is only felt by the force of my grief ; it is under the features of a hostile power that it is known.

“ Adieu then my country ! Adieu the land from which I received my birth ! recollections of my childhood, adieu ! What have ye to do with death ? You who in

my writings have found sentiments correspondent to your own souls, O my friends, wherever you are, adieu! It is not in an unworthy cause that Corinna has suffered, she has not forfeited her claim to your pity.

“Lovely Italy! in vain did you open to me your charms, what could you do for a heart forsaken? Would you awaken my recollections, to augment my pain? Would you recal the image of happiness to make me indignant at my fate?

“I submit with mildness to its decrees. O you who will survive me, when the spring shall return remember how I loved its beauties, how I praised its air and its perfumes! Sometimes call to mind my verses which bear the stamp of my soul; but think that fatal muses—Love and misfortune have inspired my last strains.

“When the designs of Providence respecting us are accomplished, an internal

music prepares us for the arrival of the angel of death. There is nothing fearful, nothing terrible in this celestial messenger—his wings are white ; but he walks enveloped in night, yet a thousand presages announce his arrival.

“ Does the wind murmur, we fancy we hear his voice. At the close of day, the shadows which cover the fields, appear like the foldings of his flowing robe. At noon, when the living and the healthy see nothing but a pure sky, feel nothing but a brilliant sun, she whom the angel of death reclaims, perceives at a distance a cloud which is soon to veil all nature from her eyes.

“ Youthful hopes, young emotions, I take my leave of you for ever. Far from me be every deceitful regret ; if some tears are yet allowed me, if I believe myself yet beloved, it is because I am about to disappear, but were I to seize upon life, it would turn against me all its daggers.

“ And you, O Rome! where my ashes will be transported, pardon me you who have beheld so many die, if with a trembling step, I join your illustrious dead; pardon me, if I pity my own lot. Sentiments and thoughts, perhaps noble, perhaps fertile, are extinguished with me, and of all the faculties of the soul, for which I am indebted to nature, that of suffering is the only one of which I have the full exercise.

“ No matter, I must obey. The great mystery of death whatever it maybe, brings tranquillity with it. You are my security, ye silent tombs; thou art my security bountiful Deity. I had made my choice on earth, and my heart has no longer any asylum. You will decide for me, and my lot will be the better for it.”

Thus finished the last song of Corinna.

The hall resounded with a deep and melancholy murmur of applause, and Lord Neville, unable to support the violence of his emotion, fell senseless on the ground. Corinna seeing him in this situation, wished to go to him, but her strength failed her the moment she attempted to rise; she was conducted home, and from that moment, there was no hope of her life.

She sent for a venerable priest, in whom she placed great confidence, and conversed a long time with him. Lucilia repaired to her, and so moved was she by the grief of Oswald, that she threw herself at her sister's feet to conjure her to receive him; but Corinna refused, though free from any feeling of resentment—"I pardon him," said she "for having torn my heart; men do not know the evil they do, and society persuades them that it is merely pastime to fill a heart with love and then abandon

it to despair. But in this my dying moment God has given me the grace to recover my tranquillity, and I feel that the sight of Oswald would fill my soul with sentiments which do not accord with the agonies of death—religion alone claims this awful hour. I pardon him whom I so much loved,” continued she, with a feeble voice, “may he live happy with you. But when the time shall come that he too must quit this earthly scene, let him then think of poor Corinna. She will watch over him if God permit; for we do not cease to love, when our affection has cost us our life.”

Oswald was at the threshold of the door, sometimes about to enter in spite of the positive prohibition of Corinna, and at other times quite absorbed in woe. Lucilia went from one to the other, the mediating angel between despair and agony.

One evening it was thought that Corinna was better, and Lucilia obtained Oswald's consent to go with her to their daughter, whom they had not seen for three days. Corinna during this interval found herself worse, and fulfilled all the duties of religion. We are assured that she said to the old ecclesiastic who received her last confession :—" Father, you now know my sad destiny, pronounce judgment on me. I never sought revenge for an injury done me ; never was I insensible to the sufferings of others ; my faults are those of the passions, which would not be culpable in themselves if human weakness and human pride had not blended error with excess. Do you believe, O my father, you who have experienced more of life than me, do you believe that God will pardon me ?"—" Yes daughter," said the old man, " is your heart now entirely his ?"—" I believe so father," answered she,

“take from me this portrait (it was that of Oswald), and place at my heart the image of him who descended upon earth, not to the aid of power and genius, but to that of suffering and death, which most needed his succour. Corinna then perceived the Prince Castel-Forte, who was weeping by her bed side.—“My friend,” said she, stretching her hand to him “you are all that I find near me now. I lived for love, and were it not for you, I should die alone.”—Her tears flowed as she uttered these words, then she added.—“However the moment is now arrived when I can dispense with assistance, our friends can only follow us to the threshold of life. There begin thoughts whose depth cannot be imparted.”

She caused herself to be carried in an arm chair to the window, that she might once more behold the sky. Lucilia then

returned, and the wretched Oswald, unable to contain himself any longer, followed her, and fell on his knees before Corinna. She wished to speak to him, but had not the strength. She lifted her eyes to Heaven, and saw the moon which was covered with the same cloud she had made Lord Nelville notice when they stopped on the sea shore on their way to Naples.—She pointed to it with her dying hand; and her last sigh caused this hand to drop.

What became of Oswald? Such was his distraction that fears were entertained at first for his reason, and for his life. He followed the funeral procession of Corinna to Rome. He shut himself up a long time at Tivoli, whither he would not permit either his wife or his daughter to accompany him. At length attachment and duty recalled him to them, and they returned

to England together. Lord Nelville gave an example of domestic life, the most regular and most pure. But did he pardon himself for his past conduct? Did he derive consolation from the world who approved of it? Was he satisfied with a common lot, after what he had lost? All this I know not, nor will I in this respect either blame or acquit him.

FINIS.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF LONDON
FROM THE FOUNDATION
TO THE PRESENT TIME

Page 22. June 1
LONDON in the year 1066
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Page 106. June 21
After the death of King
Edward of England, the
nobles of the kingdom
chose from the royal house
the Pope's son, who was
named, which was done
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NOTES TO THE FIFTH VOLUME.

PAGE 28, line 3.

Talma having passed several years of his life in London, his admirable genius has combined the character and beauties of the dramatic art in both countries.

PAGE 108, line 21.

After the death of Dante, the Florentines, ashamed of having permitted him to die at a distance from his natural home, sent a deputation to the Pope, to beseech him to let them have his remains, which were buried at Ravenna; but the Pope refused, thinking, justly, that the country which had afforded the exile an asylum, was to him his native land; therefore he would not give up the honor of possessing his tomb.

PAGE 109, line 6.

Alfieri said, that it was walking in the church of

Santa Croce, that he felt for the first time the love of glory, and it is there that he was buried. The epitaph which he composed for his respectable friend, the Countess of Albany, and for himself, contains the most moving and simple expressions of a long and perfect friendship.

Page 24, line 20.

It having been announed at Bologna, that an eclipse of the sun would take place at two o'clock in the day, the people collected in the market-place to behold it, and impatient at its delay, called for it with petulance, as they would for an actor who made them wait. At length it began; but the cloudy weather preventing it from producing a grand effect, they began to hiss with great tumult, not finding the shew equal to their expectation.

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